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Levels of Perception and Reproduction of Reality in Modern African Literature

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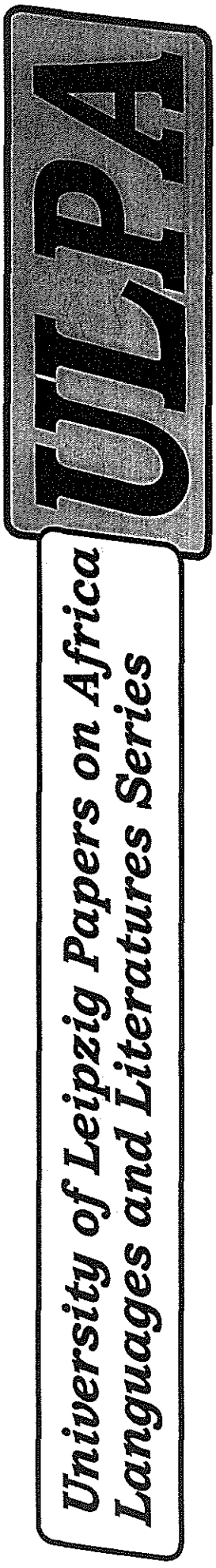
Edited by
Hilke Meyer-Bahlburg



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Levels of Perception and Reproduction of Reality in Modern African Literature

by

Hilke Meyer-Bahlburg

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Introduction

Reality has been a subject matter of human intellectual pursuit since philosophy began. And ever since humans have been fascinated by the question of what is being perceived and how it is being presented. The ensuing manifestations of reality represent our cultural memory, saved from oblivion in literature. If we accept this as one possible definition of literature, every culture - oral or written - has its cultural memory, in as many facets as there are participants in the cultural process. And, in a symposium like the one documented here, there are again as many variants on perception and reproduction of reality as there are participants, and papers submitted.

The first three papers assembled here deal with modern African literature in English and French. These literatures are fairly well known and generally the ones most dealt with at conferences.

Oyekan Owomoyela puts negritude, the most important historic aspect of French African literature, into perspective by pronouncing it to be one of the most decisive although controversial developments in the African world. Recent years have witnessed assaults on the edifices that negritude built, by advocates of full African emancipation, who are, however, unable to take into consideration that this is again a derogation of African values; a complex view of African reality is again - as so often - screened off.

R. Böttcher-Wöbcke's paper focusses on two of Ama Ata Aidoo's works. In the play *Anowa* as well as in the novel *Changes* male and female characters live in the same world without sharing a common perception of reality and with rather reduced means of communication. It is the object of the paper to find out how a character's language can reveal and influence his or her view of reality.

Marion Pape's paper on Flora Nwapa's novel *Never Again* examines the author's treatment of the Nigerian Civil War. The novel was the first female contribution to the civil war literature but has not yet found a wider echo. Nwapa depicts the war on different levels, the role of women during the war as well as the searching for a new identity amidst chaos and dislocation. By doing so Nwapa somehow counterbalances the male voices of writers and critics who have enjoyed a much larger propagation of their works. Nwapa's clear anti-war attitude and her reflective self-critical representation of the Biafran propaganda machinery try to overcome the ethnic bias and so her novel in a way, becomes part of a "national" literature bridging the trenches the war has dug.

Cornelia Uschtrin, in her paper on Portuguese African literature, widens the well-known field of African literatures by tearing lusophone literature from its marginal existence. This

paper takes the reader to a semi-fantastic complex world of different levels of reality as depicted in Mia Couto's novel *Terra Sonâmbula*. With the help of a literary diary, which is being read in the course of novel, the complex world is made comprehensible. Literary devices from different cultures, dreams and the imagination of the readers and of the characters in the novel help to create a reality which then serves as an inner exile from the misery of a cruel world at war.

Modern African literature is not solely written in European languages, although the fact that there are novels, plays and poetry written in Hausa and Swahili among others, has escaped the attention of most European readers. Here again, new ground has been broken.

Stanisław Piłaszewicz's paper is about eleven manuscripts by Alhaji Umaru (1858-1934), a Hausa writer and learned man, dealing with the history of Hausaland. Piłaszewicz can prove that, against all expectations, Umaru was an independent observer of historical events and an independent chronicler, departing considerably from the written tradition of the writing of his time.

Shaban Mayanja's paper deals with the contemporary poet Okot p'Bitek, especially with the rendering of African poetry into a European language. When Okot p'Bitek wrote *Song of Lawino* he wrote his epic novel in Acoli and only later did he render it into English. The two versions of the book help to exemplify the problems of translation. *Song of Lawino* has as subject matter the devastating effect a European life-style has on African values. The greatest difficulty for the author was, according to his own words, the transfer of African ideas into a European language, because of the incompatibility of ideas on both conceptual and linguistic level. If a European language is a tool to render African concepts in this European language, how many of these tools can writers borrow before their African ideas are affected by the influence of foreign ideas implied in the very tools of expression? In what way does the European language exercise an influence on the African thinking, the author of this paper asks.

The last two contributions deal with literary manifestations in present day Nigeria. The authors draw our attention to the importance, the political and social relevance of literary works in an African state.

Ezenwa-Ohaeto's paper is about two opposing reactions towards today's reality in Nigeria. Hope and despair are the underlying currents in poetry from contemporary Nigeria with, sadly enough, a tilt towards the feeling of despair which seems gradually to lead to favouring a violent solution of the socio-political problems.

In an off-schedule obituary Joe McIntyre pays tribute to the life, the political commitment and the literary achievement of the Nigerian writer Ken Saro-Wiwa.

The symposium "Levels of Perception and Reproduction of Reality in Modern African Literature" took place from March 25-27, 1996 at the Institute of African and Ethiopian Studies of the University of Hamburg.

It was sponsored by Volkswagenstiftung.

Rita Böttcher-Wöbcke

The African Condition at the End of the Twentieth Century: The Perils of Clouded Vision and Reduced Perceptiveness

Oyekan Owomoyela

The twentieth century dawned with the colonizing project rampant in Africa, but by mid-century, with Europe battered and somewhat sobered by two bloody conflicts, its tide was quite evidently in recession, and as the colonized areas assumed independence the expectation was widespread that by century's end the continent will have fully emerged into full autonomy. As we approach the end of the century the moment seems opportune for us to take stock, to see how far we have advanced (or regressed) with regard to that expectation. My intention in this paper is to review some of the evidence indicating the present condition of the continent in that light. My primary focus will be on literary matters, with occasional forays, of course, into other, relevant discourses.

ALA 1995, and *RAL* (Spring 1996)

Central to my discussion will be two recent events in the African literature circuit. The first is the 1995 annual meeting of the US-based African Literature Association (ALA) hosted by The Ohio State University in Columbus, Ohio, whose theme was "The Postcolonial Condition". The second event is the appearance of the latest (Spring 1996) issue of *Research in African Literatures* (*RAL*), the premier scholary journal on African literatures in the United States, and an official organ of both the ALA and the African Literatures section of the Modern Language Association. It features, immediately after the editorial and a lead article, a section on "Shakespeare in Africa" in which four African scholars discuss aspects of that subject.

The two events are rather closely connected. In the first place, the venue for the annual meeting is also the home of *Research in African Literatures*. In the second place, the editor of the journal, Abiola Irele, was also one of the conveners of the 1995 ALA annual meeting. In the third place, the lead article in the spring 1996 issue of *RAL*, "The Postcolonial Condition: The Archeology of African Knowledge: From the Feast of Ogun and Sango to the Postcolonial Creativity of Obatala", is substantially the Plenary Address, "The Archeology of African Knowledge", delivered by His Excellency Nouréini Tidjani-Serpos (Ambassador and Permanent Representative of the Republic of Benin to UNESCO) to keynote the Columbus meeting. In the fourth place, one of the four articles in the "Shakespeare in Africa" section of the new *RAL*, Alamin M. Mazrui's "Shakespeare in Africa: Between English and Swahili

Literature", had been presented at the Columbus meeting as "Shakespeare in Kenya: Between English and Swahili Literature", on the panel "Literature and National (Re)construction". Finally, on that same panel Lupenga Mphande gave a paper with the title "The Malawian Writers Group: Recreating Malawian Literature"; it also appears in the Shakespeare section of the new *RAL* as "Dr. Hastings Kamuzu Banda and the Malawi Writers Group".

SHAKESPEARE and RAL EDITORIAL

Shakespeare's place in the English literary canon might suffice to justify the prominence *RAL* has accorded him, although some scholars, African and non-African alike, might wonder at his celebration even in the context of African discourses on decolonization, national reconstruction, and the forging of an African identity. The editor's comment, "Shakespeare and Company", provides the rationalization. In it the editor calls his reader's attention to the reality the discussion of language use (in African literatures) obscures, viz, that even though our literary production might ultimately hack back to traditional practices, the immediate impetus for all modern African writing, whether in African or European languages, and the determining influence have been supplied by Western master texts. While he does not dispute Harold Bloom's claim (which Alamin Mazrui cites in his paper) that Shakespeare belongs to Western culture, he rebukes Bloom nonetheless for forgetting or ignoring the investment of non-Westerners and their cultures in the Western bard, and cites as bolster for his point the reliance of writers like Thomas Mofolo, Wole Soyinka, and J. P. [Bekederemo] Clark on Shakespearean and other classical Western texts, and the various translations of Shakespeare into African languages.

Alamin Mazrui's Paper

In addressing the translation of Shakespeare's works into Swahili, Mazrui discusses in his *RAL* article Kenyan President Moi's reinstatement of Shakespeare (beginning with *Romeo and Juliet*) in the English-language literature syllabus of Kenya's high schools in 1992, long after cultural nationalists like Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o and Taban Lo Liyong had seen to his deletion in 1969 (see Ngũgĩ 87-109), and wonders if Moi's action was due to a mature nationalism that was capable of accommodating external cultural influences, or to a "dependency-syndrome" that he observes has characterized African leadership for decades. "Could this dependency factor, then," he asks, "better explain Moi's intervention on behalf of Shakespeare? Could the British government, for example, which has been investing substantial amounts of funds in Kenya's educational system, especially in the teaching of English language and literature ..., have influenced the president to rehabilitate Shakespeare in Kenyan schools?" (65).

Mazrui goes on to discuss the justifications for the translation. One is the belief that the infusion of the richness that Shakespeare represents into Swahili will enrich the language, for "the ability of Swahili to carry the literary experience of other cultures belies the belief of some scholars that Swahili is lexically poor" (71). That, precisely, was the motive of Julius Nyerere, Tanzania's first president, in translating Shakespeare. But while criticizing Ali Mazrui for the Eurocentricism of his suggestion that only radical reinterpretations of European works in Swahili can qualify them for the title of Swahili-language literature, just as only the radical reinterpretation of the *Rubaiyat of Omar Khayam* by Edward Fitzgerald qualifies it for the title of English-language literature ("Need the Swahili, and for that matter African peoples, treat literary translations as Europeans do?"), he takes a position on the issue that could be construed as also Eurocentric. "Ironically," he writes, "the ability of the Swahili language to carry European classics in translation has been seen as a tribute to the language's own literary might. And the promotion of the language through these translations is ultimately a contribution to the promotion of its literature" (72). What Alamin perceives as Eurocentricism in Ali is the latter's adoption of the same standard Europeans would use to measure effective cross-cultural transfer of literary texts, whereas what Alamin endorses is the reduction of the African language to the status of a mere vehicle for European literary materials. Why, one might ask, should the touchstone for the might of an African language be its ability to carry European classics?

Alamin and Ali Mazrui's Ecumenicalism

To reassure those who might raise such questions, Alamin Mazrui invokes Ali Mazrui's familiar notion of ecumenicalism (1974: 6-7) with reference here, though, to language and identity - the extent to which language and culture are coextensive and irrevocably linked (the relativist/universalist opposition). A few years earlier a special issue of *RAL* in spring 1992, during the tenure of the previous editor Richard Bjornson, concentrated on "The Language Question". Alamin Mazrui's contribution to it, "Relativism, Universalism, and the Language of African Literature", examines the "relativist" and "universalist" positions on the question. The "relativist" position argues "a causal relationship among language, culture, and cognition" (68), while the universalists claim that there is no real or necessary connection among them. Mazrui reports that the relativist hypothesis has been attacked on the basis of empirical evidence, citing several scholars who "have called into question the research data that supposedly supports [sic] the relativist position".

Ali Mazrui introduces the notion of "communalist" languages to represent the relativist position, and "ecumenical" ones for the universalist stance. Communalist languages are ethnic-bound and "serve to define as communities those who speak them as mother tongues"; ecumenical languages supposedly transcend ethnic boundaries (74). Alamin Mazrui goes on to speak of the "absorptive capacity" Ali Mazrui attributes to communalist languages, a capacity

which, in his view, ecumenical languages lack. By this he means that ecumenical languages do not absorb those who speak them into the ethnicity the languages would signify. Thus, those who speak English, an ecumenical language, are not absorbed into Englishness, but those who speak communalist languages are absorbed into the associated ethnicities. This ingenious formulation permits us to be Anglophone without needing to worry about our Africanness. Alamin Mazrui thus stops short of Ali Mazrui's conception of the ideal African of the future as an "Afro-Saxon."

The Preservation of Culture and Content

Obviously, Alamin Mazrui's underlying preoccupation, which is consistent in all of his papers that I have cited, is to explore and suggest the possibility of separating culture from language, the feasibility, in other words, of being Europhone and at the same time culturally African. With regard to African literary expression specifically, after seeming to undermine the argument for reinstating African languages, Mazrui in fact concedes in the end that it has some merit. Probably, he writes, "linguistic relativism would be vindicated in the ... area of literary discourse. Perhaps the cognitive processes involved in literary creativity differ from those of scientific discourse and would be more appropriately described by a modified form of linguistic relativism than by a universalism that has found its most fertile ground in computer science" (71).

Already evident is something of a tension between the position of the *RAL* editorial and that of Alamin Mazrui's contribution. It is evident in the comments on Harold Bloom in both essays, one differing with him while the other agrees with him. Whereas Mazrui endorses Bloom's investment of Shakespeare's work with a universalism "so universally apprehended in all languages as to have established a pragmatic multiculturalism around the globe, one that already far surpasses our political fumblings towards such an idea" (quoted by Alamin Mazrui, 1996: 75), in other words, Bloom's making Shakespeare available for appropriation by people with no cultural affinity with him, Irele chides Bloom, as we have seen, for not acknowledging or conceding Shakespeare's effective assimilation of peoples of other cultures. The distinction is significant.

Saro-Wiwa's on Language Choice

Another contributor to the earlier (1992) *RAL* issue is the late Ken Saro-Wiwa, who while seeming to argue against linguistic relativism in literature, in fact, like Mazrui, winds up according it more than qualified support. Saro-Wiwa offers persuasive arguments for [his] writing in English: it is a choice he makes because he would like to reach a larger audience than Khana, his mother tongue, would have guaranteed. But, he says, he is in the process of

writing a novel in Khana, not to prove a point, but to offer his mother something else besides the bible to read, the bible being the only work available in Khana, the only language in which his mother is literate (155-56). What he does here is remind us of an audience, perhaps not a large one, but considerable nonetheless, for literature in African languages (not what we customarily regard as African literatures), an audience that is always at risk of being forgotten.

Saro-Wiwa protests that writing in English, liking Shakespeare and Beethoven and Dickens and Chaucer and Hemingway, and knowing something of European cultures, do not make him any less Ogoni; he eats Ogoni food, sings Ogoni songs, and dances to Ogoni music. Besides, he continues, he contributes more to the Ogoni world than do many Ogoni who do not speak English (156). But, he writes:

> African literature is written in several languages, including the extra-African languages of English, French, and Portuguese. As more and more writers emerge, as criticism responds to their works, as African languages increasingly acquire written forms, *and as communities become more politically aware of the need to develop their languages and cultures*, African literature will break down into its natural components, and we will speak of Ogoni literature, Igbo literature, Fanti literature, Swahili literature, etc. But there will continue to be *an* African literature written in English and French and Portuguese. (157; my italics)

Saro-Wiwa's point is that eventually, *and ideally*, African literature will be constituted in the main by writing in African languages, but that there will also always be some writing in those extra-African languages. In other words, Saro-Wiwa countenances the use of extra-African languages only as a stop-gap until more African languages are written, *and only until our political perception increases, and with it our regard for our languages and cultures.*

Tidjani-Serpos's Analysis of Soyinka

Tidjani-Serpos takes a definite stand in his keynote address in relation to what we might describe as the cultural relativism debate. His essay is an investigation of how "deicide" has "enabled thinkers who refuse both a mind-deadening extraversion and a specific and ancestral ethnocentricism to develop theoretical models and methodologies with the utmost rigor" (3). His model is Wole Soyinka's reworking of the Yoruba creation myth involving the gods Ogun, Obatala, and Sango. The choice of Soyinka in this particular context is perhaps inevitable, considering the admiring reference to him by some African scholars as "our W.S.", and also his winning the Nobel Prize for literature in 1986. (The nature and source of that

certification are themselves significant.) Soyinka's creative ideology, according to Tidjani-Serpos, is that

> Black African writers should turn their attention to the mythological world of their peoples, bring out the principal actors, the identity, and action principles that they represent in order to dust them off, weigh them up, analyze them, examine them critically, and re-inject into the information loop of the Black African intellectual debate those elements that are likely to generate a new vision of things and beings. This would permit the production of a discourse, a theory which, while being universally applicable, will keep at the same time a Black African flavor. (4)

A brief summary of the main points of the relevant Yoruba myths concerning Obatala and Sango will be useful at this point. With regard to Obatala (or Orisanla), one of the traditions is that he had the creative responsibility of fashioning the human form out of clay, but the final and crucial act of animation, the bestowal of breath, Olodumare the supreme creator reserved for himself. Obatala revolted against the perceived slight by creating albinos and other deformities. With regard to Sango, disgraced as the ruler of Oyo, he abandoned the city and hanged himself in the forest. When the unflattering report began to be broadcast through the community, though, his partisans devised a means of calling down lightning on the detractors' homes until they changed their story and announced that Sango did not hang after all. In time, the newly deified Sango displaced Jakuta as the god of lightning, thunderbolts, and (by extension) electricity.

Tidjani-Serpos highlights a feature of Soyinka's mythmaking - the same infatuation with science and technology that is at the bottom of African philosophers' flirtation with westernism. Soyinka, he says, "has cut all the rich complexities of Obatala Orisanla's character, ... because he has unconsciously privileged Sango's technical bravura compared with Obatala's apparently placid attitude" (12). Nevertheless, he credits Soyinka with devising a strategy that enables us to "keep the deceptive exterior of the old state of things", while investing it with a new valency (15). In other words, even the much maligned folklorisms are stultifying only if one internalizes the always untenable construction of African institutions as immutable, and, therefore, incapable of adaptation to new circumstances and uses. It is untenable, of course, because it fails to acknowledge a feature that has long been recognized as characteristic of the African world - structural amnesia.

The strategy Tidjani-Serpos attributes to Soyinka argues against the campaign that we abandon African thought, even African mythology, and African institutions in order to embrace the spirit of Europe, a campaign based on the essentialist notion that technology is inseparable from Europeanness or westernness, and that in order to embrace it (should we decide to embrace it) we must also become Western beings.

In this extreme form the campaign proffers no possibility of cross-pollination between Africanity and westernity. Tidjani-Serpos credits Soyinka with providing for periodic cultural reevaluation and revision:

> Soyinka's approach clearly shows that a cultural heritage must be subjected to the heat of critical evaluation, for when the historical circumstances which saw the beginnings of a cultural and artistic phenomenon have disappeared, the work, depending on the times and preoccupations of the people living in each of these times, will be loaded with a new significance, a new readability different from that of its origin. (17)

But, says Tidjani-Serpos, such reevaluation and revision cannot be an excuse for abandoning one's roots and cultural heritage:

> Those who are afraid and ashamed of their roots, those who rail against the Voduns and Orishas in daylight, and worm their way through alleys and paths to watch Vodun-Orisha ceremonies at night, these are not the artists ... Yes, we can, with humility and tolerance, critically listen to the critique of our cultural heritage, without, however, refusing to be fully in tune with our time. We can calmly and quite openly discuss our past without choosing to look at our own culture from the standpoint of other people's values. (17-18)

Our development of theoretical reflections, he continues, cannot be through "a pure and simple rejection of the past. In the field of social sciences, if the true African intellectual élite wants to build an authentic modernity, he must ask himself the question of the legitimacy of the *Powers* wich were constituted by visions of the world, ideologies and cosmogonies[,] and in their midst, open up a discursive route which will lead towards a methodology of *Counter Powers*" (18; his emphasis).

How does Soyinka's position on the valuation of cultural resources compare with those I earlier associated with Alamin Mazrui and Saro-Wiwa, and, ultimately, how consistent is it with the development of an ideology of Counter-Power? To reiterate, according to Tidjani-Serpos's analysis, Soyinka having dispensed with language (since he writes in English) retains content, which he modifies, however, to suit modern constructs. That approach accounts for the widely held opinion that his creativity takes tradition, especially the Yoruba one, as its wellspring. But the caveat Tidjani-Serpos expresses about his usage is noteworthy. The preference for "Sango's technical bravura" and the militaristic technologicalism of Ogun (the artist Soyinka's patron god) decisively aligns Soyinka with the modern Western spirit. As Tidjani-Serpos points out, the Africanity manifest in Soyinka's art is really a "deceptive exterior" within which refashioned Africanisms proclaim that we are in fact all Greeks, if only the observer was perceptive enough to see through our disguises.

Accordingly, Soyinka's invention of a Yoruba tragic sense, to which end he equates Ogun with Dionysus and Obatala with Apollo (140-41), is consistent with his penchant for forcing

Yoruba thought (and the Yoruba world) into European molds. The Yoruba conception of divinity is surely very different from the Greek one. The Yoruba, for example, do not grovel before inscrutable, whimsical gods (with the possible exception of Esu); formal relationships between humans and gods are strictly contractual and reciprocative, ones in which default on one part justifies default, retribution, and even repudiation on the other. The Yoruba do not harbor Aeschylean or Sophoclean ideas about the relationships, nor do they consider themselves in their relationship to the gods (in the Shakespearean formulation) as flies to wanton children.

The Language Debate: Achebe to Mazrui, to *RAL* Editorial

Were we to review the long-running debate on the choice of language in African literatures we would detect an interesting evolution in certain representative positions from the 1960s to the present. In an essay written in 1964, Chinua Achebe subordinated fidelity to his African language to safeguarding the integrity (or sanctity) of his African experience and the African content of his work. "I feel," he wrote, "that the English language will be able to carry the weight of my African experience. But it will have to be a new English, still in full communion with its ancestral home but altered to suit its new African surroundings" (84). As we have noted, the argument justifying translating Shakespeare into Swahili is that by demonstrating its capacity to carry European material Swahili thereby demonstrates its strength. Thus, while for Achebe it is the foreign language that must prove its ability to bear African cultural materials, for those who susbcribe to the view Alamin Mazrui enunciates it is the African language that bears the onus of proving its capacity for conveying European, or Western, treasures. The privilege, I am arguing, has passed from African (in Achebe) to Western (in Mazrui) content, the African language serving simply as a substitute (or subsidiary) vehicle, since there can be little doubt that *European* languages will always be better media than African ones for conveying *European* ideas, just as African languages will always be better suited to expressing African ideas.

RAL Radicalism

For those interested in the integrity of African cultural resources and in postcolonial cultural recuperation the shift might be troubling, but it is not nearly as radical as the one the Spring 1996 *RAL* editorial expresses. The editor goes beyond underscoring Alamin Mazrui's argument to the point of undermining his nod to the priority of African languages for certain usages. Our cultural space, the editorial says, has in any case been far more decisively invaded than we like to admit. Its intention, moreover, is not to arouse Africans for recuperative and restorative action, but, rather, to discourage what it implies would be quixotic, ill-advised

(because retrogressive) efforts. Shakespeare, Handel, and the like, it contends, are so integral a part of the African world (or Africans have been so thoroughly assimilated into their orbit) that their meaning has been "displaced for us from the vertical plane of its function in the colonial discourse of power, to be integrated more or less firmly within the horizontal perspective of an indigenous symbolic universe" (1). It thus sanitizes these quintessentially Western texts by absolving them of all connection with the colonizing project.

Irele's editorial must be read (for its full import) against the backdrop of his earlier essay "In Praise of Alienation," his 1982 inaugural lecture as the Professor and Head of the Department of Modern Languages at the University of Ibadan (first published by the author in 1987, and later, in 1992, in Mudimbe's *The Surreptitious Speech*), in which he first advanced Africans' claim to Western culture. The underlying thesis of that essay is that the African future lies in the direction of westernization, for, as he argued, "as a matter of practical necessity, we have no choice but in the direction of Western culture and civilization" (215). Even earlier he had suggested that "we may very well find that our reliance on the European languages will increase, not decrease, with time" (1981: 61). His reference to the lacuna he believes the language debate betrays - that we are far more Western in culture than we care to admit or are able to perceive - is intended to urge that we might as well concede the reality and go whole hog. Put differently, the editorial challenges Tidjani-Serpos's endorsement of the opposition of Counter-Powers to the established [Western] Powers.

Culture and Imperialism

We cannot consider our present condition without reference to the manner of its development; we cannot divorce our attitude towards the hegemony of European cultures in Africa from how it came about. Undeniably, the reduction of Africa to the status of possession of European imperial powers was a violent process, the violence being one against Africans and African cultures. Although the period Edward Said focuses on in *Culture and Imperialism* is much later than Shakespeare's time, what he says about the role of art (including literature) in the service of imperialism applies also to the August bard. (After all, later colonizers were simply living up to the idea of a brave new world that he had rhapsodized in *The Tempest*.) Said disclaims any notion of accusing Wordsworth, Austen, or Coleridge of goading Britain towards imperialism, but he invites us to consider their contrastive writing about Britain and the world beyond the British Isles:

> We shall find them using striking but careful strategies, many of them derived from expected sources - positive ideas of home, of a nation and its language, of proper order, good behavior, moral values.
> But positive ideas of this sort do more than validate "our" world. They also tend to devalue other worlds and, perhaps more significantly from a

> retrospective point of view, they do not prevent or inhibit or give resistance to horrendously unattractive imperial practices. (81)

African readers of Shakespeare would be most obtuse to miss the explicit racism in *Othello* (a play I am always reticent to teach to my University of Nebraska students), or to attribute all the anti-negro sentiments to Iago and Brabantio exclusively. There is, undoubtedly, some significance to the often remarked fact that the plays, and especially *The Tempest* (because of its particular colonial resonance), have not attracted the attention of African translators. Alamin Mazrui remarks the point in his article (77n1), and Ali Mazrui has repeatedly called attention to the *Othello* occlusion, in his presentations at Columbus, in Kenya, and in his Mazrui Newsletter No. 20 (13). Furthermore, writers on the dynamics and mechanisms of imperialism have found *The Tempest* exemplary - one such scholar being O. Mannoni (1964) - the role of language being of particular importance to them. It serves Prospero's end to assume that before his arrival on Caliban's island the latter's world was linguistically empty, and, therefore, that Caliban's ability to speak was born with his learning Prospero's language. Similarly, imperialism justified itself by denying prior value or consciousness to the colonized "other". Indeed, as V.Y. Mudimbe has pointed out, the *Romanus Pontifex* denied even existence (and the right to it) to the "other" by declaring the land he/she occupied to be empty - *terra nullius* - and both the land and its resources therefore appropriable by Christian Europeans after their elimination of the illegitimate occupiers (1994: 30-37).

Colonialism and Negritude

Mudimbe describes European colonization as the organization and transformation of non-European areas "into fundamentally European constructs" (1988: 1), and also the establishment of a "dichotomizing system" entailing "paradigmatic oppositions," like "traditional versus modern; oral versus written and printed; agrarian and customary communities versus urban and industrialized civilizations; [and] subsistence economies versus highly productive economies" (4). He might have included "Afrophone versus Europhone; and Afrocentric versus Eurocentric". These were "the means of trivializing the whole traditional mode of life and its spiritual framework."

The colonial organization employed a colonial narrative designed not only to make the nasty business of despoiling, decimating, enslaving, and subjugating other peoples in far-flung places palatable to the home population, but also to persuade the victims of the necessity, even desirability, of their fate. The narrative, in other words, was, as far as the colonized was concerned, to make him/her concede the colonizer's point about the pathology of his/her previous state, and, therefore, to acquiesce in his/her refashioning in the colonizer's image. The measure of its success is its stubborn resilience more than half a century after it faced its first orchestrated ideological challenge in negritude in the 1940s.

Negritude is arguably one of the most decisive developments in Africa's cultural history during the twentieth century. In a sense it represented a coming into consciousness about the African condition at a particular historical moment, a realization of the invidiousness of colonialism and the brainwashing of the African into abandoning Africanity in preference for a proffered but ultimately unattainable (even if desirable) westernity. Negritude and, after it, the African personality and other Afro-assertive slogans, were the necessary antithesis to the colonizing narrative; they provided the program that moved Africans away from the nadir of pathologization and self-deprecation, towards a healthy appreciation of the African heritage.

Right from the beginning, of course, a dialectical reaction to negritude was evident in Anglophone countries, its most catchy expression (perhaps) being Soyinka's gibe that a tiger does not go about proclaiming its tigritude, but it did not prevent Anglophone scholars and writers from following the negritude suit, although without the stridency associated with it in Francophone areas. After all, what else could one make of Achebe's famous manifesto other than a reiteration of negritude's basic program? More recently, even scholars from the Francophone camp that spawned negritude, philosophers especially, have distanced themselves from its orientation and its contents, dubbing its celebratory cultural assertiveness as nothing but "garrulous negrism" (Hountondji 159). Its commitment to reversing the effects of colonialism, moreover, they see as misdirected. The desirable form of decolonization, one infers from their argument, would be not a return to Africanity, but, rather, the perpetuation of the effects of colonization but without the colonizers.

The British and English; the French and their Defence Waves

Our predilection as Africans for undervaluing, devaluing, or at least minimizing the importance (not to say the necessity) of, our cultural resources is in stark contrast to the behaviour of other peoples and cultures, especially those of the Europeans we ape. Alamin Mazrui's 1996 paper makes a passing reference to the considerable sums of money the British spend on promoting the use of English by other peoples, and they are not alone in this regard. The French do the same through the *Alliance Française*, and, indeed, the basis for *francophonie*, the prop for French international prestige, is the use of French. The Germans also promote interest in German and German culture through the Goethe Institute. These linguistic projections of power demonstrate the importance the English, the French, and the Germans attach to the viability, vitality, and, indeed, mere presence of their cultures among the world community of cultures.

The high regard these people accord their cultural resources like literature and the arts (Shakespeare, Proust, Wagner), is evident, for instance, in the French stand at the barricades against the inroads of both English vocabulary into French daily discourse, and foreign (English-language) music onto French air waves. On February 16, 1996 CNN reported on the

opening of another front in the campaign, the contested ground this time being popular music. Apparently, the administrators of the country's most prestigious award in the arts (the Chevalier of Arts and Letters) have been naming too many Anglophone (especially American) performers to the honor. (Peter Falk's received the latest on Thursday February 29, 1996 for his portrayal of Colombo.) French disk-jockeys have also been airing far more American hits than French ones. Offended French cultural nationalists consequently pushed through a law that requires that at least 40 % of the songs radio stations broadcast must be French. The business-minded disk-jockeys do not like the idea, for they fear it will reduce their listening audience, but the chief sponsor of the law argued that all cultures must be kept alive, remarking, "We protect endangered species".

If the French find it necessary to resist the overtures of English culture (deliberate or otherwise), which we may regard as friendly rather than hostile, since both cultures are so closely related, one would think that Africans would be resolutely implacable in not only opposing any intensification of the pressure European cultures already exert on African ones, but also in seeking to relax and ultimately eliminate it.

A Condition of Confusion

The African condition as we approach the end of the twentieth century is marked by confusion, which manifests itself in the form of continuing alienation, and, as our literary practice and discourse on it dramatize, a diminished capacity for (to borrow Soyinka's phrase) self-apprehension.

A literary embodiment of our present condition is Ousmane, the Senegalese hero of Mariama Bâ's *Scarlet Song*. He becomes attracted to Mireille, a young French woman, and despite her parents' (especially her father's) determined opposition to their liaison they decide to marry. Because he imagines himself to be deeply committed to his roots, to his blackness, Ousmane insists he will not forgo it for his desired union with Mireille, and he therefore insists that she convert to Islam, for him the bedrock of his Africanity (39).

His confusion continues after the two are married. Having burnt her cultural and familial bridges Mireille returns from Paris to live in Dakar with her husband, and soon Ousmane's insistence on fidelity to what he imagines is his blackness gives rise to frictions between the two. One of its guises is attendance at (and defence of) noisy recitals of Quranic songs that keep Mireille awake because of their proximity to the couple's sleeping quarters. For it Ousmane wins the appreciation of his father who praises his allegiance to the Islamic faith "in spite of your white wife" (84). When she complains about being robbed of sleep Ousmane retorts, "Just stop up your ears. I, on the other hand, will have the pleasure of reliving the nights of my childhood" (91). His understanding of how to "immerse himself in the heart of his own race, to live according to black values and the rhythm of the tomtom" (92) includes

refusal to wash his hands before eating (99), whereas, as every adult African should know, correct form in African communities where the usual practice is to eat with one's fingers out of communal dishes is that one does not sit down to eat without first washing one's hands.

Ousmane's friends and sister mark his confusion in reviling him for his mistreatment of Mireille. His behavior, his friend Lamine suggests, is contrary to the dictates of African wisdom. "Try to change", he counsels; " 'commune with your spirit', on your pillow. You will see where you are in the wrong. This is what African wisdom advises" (99). Ousmane fails, though, to commune with his spirit and act according to African wisdom. The result is (beyond Mireille's dementia) the destruction of Gorgui, the child of their union, who symbolized the constructive possibilities of a healthy cross-fertilization of two cultures.

The Perils of Diminished Perceptiveness

Saro-Wiwa indirectly chided us with a reminder of our alienation in his explanation for his writing a novel in his native Khana - to provide his mother with something to read. The explanation reminds us of another point the language debate has not directly addressed: the existence of the audience Saro-Wiwa's mother represents - one literate only in African languages, among whom my own mother counted. The assertion that our ultimate fate is inevitably to become Westerners, and become Europhone, with the implication that writing in African languages is fated to eventually peter out, amounts in my view to willing the disappearance of such people, and Africanity with them.

Predatoriness as Vindication

One of the arguments proponents of the westernization of Africa use is that the West (and therefore westernity) proved its superiority over Africa (and therefore Africanity) by the ease with which only a handful of Westerners defeated and subjugated all of Africa. Another is that westernization is synonymous with progress, and that progress is a necessary condition for viability in its future. I will ignore the appeal to progress in this instance and comment briefly only on the appeal to conquest. In presenting his own version of the argument Irele writes with profound admiration of Western "scientific spirit", of the "outstanding good fortune of Western civilization" in cultivating the deductive method (216). In contrast he laments "the misfortune of African civilization, the inability of our traditional world to break free from the prison of mytho-poeic imagination" (217). The Western scientific spirit, he continues, bred "a tough-mindedness that became a moral value in Europe" which "was to turn out to be emblematic not only for the internal effort to development in Europe, but also for the European's dealings with the rest of the world" (217). Having attributed the "world supremacy of Europe" to "the stubborn application of intelligence and skill to the

improvements of firearms, ocean-going vessels and ... to the perfection of all these technical resources which finally gave the advantage to the Europeans in their onslaught upon other races, other peoples and nations, other civilizations", he resorts to a Yoruba proverb to press his point home. "Now", he writes, "there is a Yoruba saying which sums up admirably the moral of the story. *'Adaniloro k'oni logbon'* which can be translated into English as 'One who causes you injury also teaches you wisdom" (218). He sums it all up by asserting, "We have entered into the intellectual inheritance of eighteenth century Europe as regards our political culture simply because its ideas have now become the property of all mankind" (219).

Irele's opposition of European "scientific spirit" to African "mytho-poeic imagination" reminds us of colonialism's "dichotomizing system" with its "paradigmatic oppositions" that Mudimbe wrote about, and in accordance with which we must assume that in Irele's schema European "tough-mindedness" must be complemented by traditional African feeble-mindedness. The proverb he finds expressive of his thesis, though, is also a product of the traditional African mind, and I concede it is well chosen. I do believe, however, that its lesson is somewhat different from what Irele suggests. In the first place, the proverb is more correctly (to the extent that one can assert that a version of a proverb is more correct than another) rendered as *adánilóró fagbára kọ́ni* (The person who causes one injury teaches one the value of strength). To explicate its full import we might refer to two other Yoruba proverbs. One says *ẹni tó juni ní ńfi ọwọ́ ẹni gbáni lójú* (Only a person more powerful than one slaps one in the face with one's own hand). The literal translation of the proverb would be "Only a person older than one ...", but what it clearly implies is strength, therefore, power. It rather succinctly characterizes what the colonialists and settlers did to their African victims - appropriate their lands and conscript them into virtual slave labor to work their appropriated lands for your benefit. According to the other proverb, *bí ọwọ́ ẹni ò bá tû tẹ ẹ̀kù idà, a kì í bèrè ikú tó pa baba ẹni* (Until one has secured an uncontested grip on the hilt of the sword one does not demand to know what manner of death took one's father).

If the Yoruba, and by extension all African peoples, are as conservative as advocates of westernization maintain, their conservatism is surely in their dogged admiration of, and fidelity to, their ancestral ways. The near-fatal assault by Europeans on these ways was, to the Yoruba, equivalent to the killing of their father by an adversary too powerful to immediately engage. The proverb *adánilóró fagbára kọ́ni* says, in effect, that since the abuser triumphed because of his superior power, the abused should learn to acquire power (in order to equip himself or herself for redress). The departure of the European at independence is in turn equivalent to the African securing an uncontested grip on the hilt of the sword, following which he/she can settle accounts with the European. The end of the acquisition of power is not to become like the abuser but to effect redress, to restore the father (to the extent, and in the manner, one can) to his rightful place. European rampaging triumph should not teach us the ethics of rampage.

At independence colonized Africans were offered, as it were, the choice between becoming kings or the couriers of kings. For the most part we have more than amply justified colonialist assertions that colonized peoples were fundamentally childlike, for have we not, childlike, opted for the immediate and easy gratification of couriership in preference for the chores of kingship, for the meretricious attraction of Western patrimonies in preference for cultivating our own? Have we not amply justified, moreover, those who acted to destroy our cultural heritage and to despoil us of our material resources, for what better justification could they have proffered than that we do not value them anyway?

The consequences of our failure to perceive the crucial importance of our cultural (including linguistic) heritage are multiple. One, certainly, is that other people are hardly likely to place great store on things African, since Africans are themselves ever eager to distance themselves from such things. According to a Yoruba proverb, *Bí a bá pe igbá ẹni ní àìkàrágbá, ayé á báni fi kólẹ̀* (Call your calabash a cast-off gourd fragment and the world will oblige you by using it for rubbish scoop). What is discredited, moreover, is not limited to Africanity but also Africanness, by which I mean *being* African. We do not need to look very far to find evidence that much of the rest of the world regards Africa and Africans as blood-crazed fratricidal murderers best kept quarantined in their own lands, as feckless burdens on international charity, and as ludicrous, hardly welcome crashers into other peoples' cultures. For information I suggest that we look not in the list of individual honors to Africans, but, rather, at the regard of Africa and Africans collectively. I suggest that we listen to statements about Africans and Black people generally that occasionally issue forth from official Tokyo, and that we read such things as the Western press coverage of Rwanda in contrast to Bosnia-Herzegovina.

It is not irrelevant that whereas in recent years peoples who have suffered abuse at the hands of other peoples have received apologies, the Koreans from the Japanese; the Americans from the Japanese; Japanese Americans from their compatriots of European descent; the Jews from the Germans, and so forth, African demands for apology and reparation from the Western world for five centuries of enslavement, colonization, and exploitation meet with ill-disguised contempt and a reintensification of the victimization and pathologization of Africans. I hasten to add that I am not particularly interested in Western apology for centuries of ill-use of Africa and Africans; it is not indispensable for our psychical healing or self-esteem. I will cite another Yoruba proverb to make my point. It advises, *Bí a ṣe rìn ni a ṣe ńkoni* (One's manner of venturing abroad determines the manner in which one is received). Self-presentation (and therefore self-knowledge), in other words, is everything. This, to use Lamine's words, is what African wisdom advises.

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Perception and Depiction of Reality in Ama Ata Aidoo's Work

Rita Böttcher-Wöbcke

Ama Ata Aidoo from Ghana, born in 1942, is among the very few women writers who have known some fame in the realm of European language writing in sub-Saharan Africa. But she is far from being taken as a great writer together with Achebe, Ngugi, Soyinka, Senghor, etc. In my paper I should like to find one possible explanation for this very sad state of affairs.

To do this I shall concentrate on two of Aidoo's works: *Anowa*, the play published in 1970, and *Changes*, the novel, published in 1991. In all her works women are the main characters, and this might be the most obvious reason for the rather limited fame she enjoys: female characters are of lesser importance with most writers, the rare exceptions prove the rule. And with the female main character the reader has to accept a "female problem", a "female point of view", which may present a barrier if you want to be taken seriously by male critics and male readers.

Now let us proceed to what the plot in *Anowa* is. The play takes place in the 1870s, in an all-African setting. Anowa is a very independently minded young woman who decides to get married on her own terms to a young man of her choice. His name is Kofi. We are made to understand by what her mother says that the young man is a good-for-nothing, "a watery male of all watery males". The couple leave their home town, start a business, are successful in making money and rather less successful in making their marriage work. The play ends in disaster: Kofi takes his own life, leaving Anowa in a state of madness.

This is a rather trivial story. The interest lies - as with all good fiction - in how it is being presented. Right from the beginning Anowa is not a girl "comme il faut". She is too independent, she follows her own mind, and there seems to be one and only one remedy to her problems: she could become a priestess, which she decides against. Anowa carries her independence into her marriage, and the experienced audience can anticipate disaster. How is Kofi going to deal with a woman who seeks fulfillment in their work as peddlers, who wants to be the partner of her husband, who wants to make her marriage work as a sincere relationship, who wants to have a family *and* a job, who wants to be taken seriously, who wants to talk problems over, who wants it all? Well, all through the play Kofi has a very effective answer to her attitude. He turns their relationship into a case of refusal. He talks to her in a non-caring way. One example for this attitude arises when he denounces her attachment to their job which involves being on the road all the time:

> My wife, sometimes you talk strangely. I do not see what is so pleasing on the highways.

Kofi does not take decisions together with Anowa, he does not discuss things with her, instead he underlines his independence by doing things on his own terms. Thus he buys two men to help them and he does so disregarding her qualms about taking in slaves. Neither does he consent to choosing a second wife in order to have a child which Anowa is wishing for.

> (The doctor) says there is nothing wrong with your womb. But your soul is too restless. You always seem to be looking for things; and that prevents you from settling. (28)[1]

With these words he perfidiously makes her responsible for their lack of children. He is totally inconsiderate as far as her wishes are concerned and diverts her attention from the fact that he too might be the cause for her barrenness. We, the audience, are presented with two different views, with two different sides of one reality.

More often than not Kofi does not consider her set of reasons, he disregards their possible validity and disqualifies Anowa in a most destructive manner by saying:

> Besides, you are only talking like a woman. (29)

If she wants it all, he wants the opposite of whatever she cares for. She sincerely tries to counteract his disqualifying attitude ; he goes on evading her sincerity. They seem to be living in two different worlds, they go on talking without communicating. His inability to listen to her reasons shows him as a very helpless, frustrated, immature person who shrinks from anything in common with her:

> But after all, we all know you are a woman and I am the man. (30)

In spite of the strength Anowa has shown in their business - Kofi could not have started the business without her - she is not taken seriously. Kofi tries to question her strength and her selfrespect by insisting on the one fact that they cannot have in common: you are a woman (i.e. exchangeable) and I am the man (i.e. the unique image of higher power). With these words he underminds their relationship. At the end of the scene, in the middle af the play, they make up again: or rather she tries to regain common ground in spite of everything, saying "Kofi, we shouldn't quarrel", and he seems to give in: "No, we shouldn't."

In the last part of the play we are confronted with the result of a lifelong misunderstanding. According to her own words Anowa has behaved like a grown-up person all her life, that is like a grown-up man. She rejected womanly behaviour right from the start. Kofi, on the other hand, has never accepted her for what she is, he goes on throwing attacks on her without

[1] Quotations are taken from A. A. Aidoo, *Anowa*, Longman, 1970.

listening to the meaning of her words. He does not react to the meaning of her words but to the indirect message he attributes to them.

Thus he keeps up a situation which is known in psychology as cross-communication.

Kofi's and Anowa's relationship ends in disaster. He threatens to call her a witch and takes his own life when he can no longer conceal the fact that he might be the reason for them not having any children. Kofi and Anowa seem to have lived in two worlds.[2]

Aidoo's novel *Changes* is situated in a modern African metropolis with its very modern protagonist: Esi, a young mother of a girl, a professional who takes her job seriously. Her husband Oko resents her professionalism and demands more time, more kindness, more understanding from her.

After having been raped by him she decides to live alone. She later decides to get married to Ali Konde who asks her to be his second wife. However, after their wedding their relationship cools down, she has all her energy for her job and feels rather lonely and seems to be finding other men.

Thus far *Changes* looks rather like a superficial soap novel. This is underlined by the fact that most characters are more or less stereotyped.

Oko is the traditional minded man who finds it important to please his family, who would like a second child, hopefully a boy, who resents the fact that his wife takes the pill and who agrees with his family that it is rather odd that his wife should earn more money than he himself. Thus the common life they should share is presented from two points of view as two worlds with very little in common.

Ali, Esi's lover and second husband, is rather more congenial and open-minded.

He takes things as they are and can quite light-heartedly combine traditional thinking and westernized attitudes. So he gets the best of both worlds without even wanting to share his life with his wives.

The situation is rather different for the female characters. Ali's first wife lives a very traditional life which means that she gave up her career to bring up their children. Her world breaks partly down when she is made to consent to a second wife. Ama Ata Aidoo tells us very clearly how devastating this event is for her when the wives of some elders want to persuade her to give in and let Ali marry a second wife. This is presented as a perversion of a traditional custom.

[2] During the discussion following the presentation of this paper Ulla Schild pointed out the fact that *Anowa* can also be read as a modern version of the tale about the Complete Gentleman. I do not want to go into any detail here, however.

Esi experiences very similar feelings of unhappiness when she states the fact that there is no room for an independent woman in her society. Traditional society had at least some room for such women to serve as priestesses.

This was, as I said in the first part of my paper, a possible option for Anowa. Modern societies do no longer offer such an alternative.

In *Changes* a woman's life is presented as taking place in several realities. In her job Esi has to keep up with men. She is expected to be a devoted mother and wife,and this sounds all too familiar to my European ears.

And if she just about manages all these roles she is in trouble again. A woman's life is presented as being cut into separate sections and if the continual switching from one section into the other does not tear a woman apart, society lets follow her ultimate exclusion: something must be wrong with her, she must be a witch. This was also the most destructive remark Kofi made about Anowa.

Esi's friend Opokuya, the third female character in *Changes*, is the one who manages best. Like Esi she tries to combine the challenges of a westernized professional life with those of a traditional life-style.

But she manages far better to juggle the demands made on her. She takes a very personal view when faced with the different aspects of life: on the one hand she refuses to follow the example of a European diet in order to lose some weight ; on the other hand she insists on the use of the big family car. Opokuya is less of a cliché, a much more complex and more universal character. Thus Opokuya could serve as a role model giving the one positive example of how to live in different worlds and still not be devastated.

The fact that *Changes* strikes one at first view as a rather superficial soap novel - as I said before - is also underlined by the fact that it is easy to read. Aidoo does not impress us with her choices of hard words, or a complicated sentence structure.

There is, however, more to it than meets the eye. In a seemingly simple language we are made to understand a very complicated fact: we are made to witness how a young and very contemporary African woman is being incorporated into a way of life which retains most of its traditional features while displaying westernized attitudes. In one scene Ali gives Esi a ring and he expects her to wear it as from that moment:

> - ...any betrothed or married woman would wear any man's ring. To let the rest of the male world know that she is bespoken.
> - That she has become occupied territory?
> - Yes, that she has become occupied territory.[3]

[3] A. A. Aidoo, *Changes*, The Women's Press, 1991, page 91.

Traditional attitudes and westernized thinking work together to keep women in their place. The novel can be read as an actual demonstration of how to prevent women from living as self-fulfilled a life as men.

This might be considered dangerous territory by some critics and publishers.

Literary Representations of the Nigerian Civil War and the Case of Flora Nwapa's *Never Again*

Marion Pape

Introduction

The Nigerian Civil War

In 1967 a civil war broke out in Nigeria, which by the name of "Biafran War" evokes associations of starving children until today. "Biafra" was the self-given name of the south-eastern province which attempted to secede from the Federal Republic of Nigeria. The area is inhabited mainly by Igbo and it is the site of rich oil-wells. In 1966, six years after independence, ethnic conflicts and political crises, the causes of which dated back to colonial times, came to a head (e.g. two military coups, pogroms against Igbo and other peoples from the Eastern Region living in northern and western Nigeria and, subsequently, the flight of the survivors towards their home regions). The widespread consent of the Igbo population to the secession, especially during its initial phase, as well as their willingness to endure a brutal war waged with modern weapons is, above all, to be explained by the fact that the majority of Igbo were convinced that they were not wanted as a part of Nigeria and were to be eradicated as a people.[1]

Due to military superiority on the part of the Nigerian federal army, which enjoyed massive support by foreign powers, the territory of Biafra rapidly shrank to a small enclave unable to attain international recognition. After thirty months of a bitterly fought civil war and enormous casualties among the civilian population, Biafra was forced to surrender unconditionally in January of 1970. After the war, the Nigerian government under General Yacubu Gowon pursued a strategy of political reintegration and national reconciliation according to the slogan: "No victors - no vanquished." This strategy was facilitated by the consolidation of the federal system and by the oil-boom, which set in soon after the war and has helped to keep Nigeria united until today.

[1] Cf. Axel Harneit-Sievers, *Kriegsfolgen und Kriegsbewältigung in Afrika: Der nigerianische Bürgerkrieg 1967-70*, Hannover 1992, p. 21 (forthcoming).

The Role of Writers and Intellectuals

After the pogroms of 1966, Igbo-writers living in western Nigeria (many of whom had taught at the universities in Lagos and Ibadan) returned to the East. Growing ethnic distrust and the increasing appropriation of ethnic differences for political purposes inevitably had adverse effects on writers and intellectuals. However, the polarization did not exclusively proceed along ethnic lines but also along political ones: There was, for example, considerable controversy over which political stance to take towards the new "nation" of Biafra, which initially comprised an area much bigger than just Igbo-land. The minority peoples in the delta of the Niger, which had simply been annexed without any opportunity for self-determination, for the most part took a sceptical or negative stand towards the secession. While "minority writers" such as the Ikwerre Elechi Amadi, the Ijaw J.P. Clark, and the Ogoni Ken Saro-Wiwa, distanced themselves from Biafra, the Ijaw Gabriel Okara, for instance, worked in favour of the Biafran government, as did his Igbo-colleagues Chinua Achebe, Cyprian Ekwensi, Christopher Okigbo, Flora Nwapa, and many others.[2] When the war began, most intellectuals had already taken position on one side or the other; some became soldiers, others emmissaries or collaborators of their respective governments; or they found themselves, like the Yoruba Wole Soyinka on the federal and Elechi Amadi on the Biafran side, in prison because of their alleged anti-Nigerian or anti-Biafran stance.

Literary Representations of the Civil War

Many Nigerian authors dealt with their war experiences through the creative process of writing, in fact, the Nigerian civil war is one of the dominant themes in Nigerian literature. Until today more than one hundred books have been published in almost every literary genre.[3] Although the boom-years of the seventies and eighties are over, new literary representations of the civil war are still being published.[4]

The vast majority of these texts include novels and personal accounts by male and female authors (mainly of eastern Nigerian origin) who survived the war as civilians or ordinary soldiers. Typical themes of the novels are the betrayal of the common man by the political leaders and ruthless war profiteers, the struggle for survival, or the social changes caused by the

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[2] Steve Ogunpitan, *The Nigerian Civil War and Creative Strategies. In: Siyan Oyeweso (ed.), Perspectives on the Nigerian Civil War*, Lagos 1992, p. 295.

[3] Cf. Craig W. McLuckie, *A Preliminary Checklist of Primary and Secondary Sources on Nigerian Civil War/Biafran War Literature*. In: *Research in African Literatures* 18:4, 1987, 510-527.

[4] See, for instance, the short stories *Civil War I-VII* by Adewale Maja-Pearce and *The Last Battle* by Ossie O. Enekwe, both in: *African Rhapsody* ed. by Nadezda Obradovic, New York 1994; the short stories *Agarachaa Must Come Home* and *The War's Untold Story*, both in: Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo's *Echoes In The Mind*, Ikeja/Lagos 1994; and the novel *Drums and the Voice of Death* by Nathan Nkala, Enugu 1996.

war. Many personal accounts serve as vindications written by high-ranking officers and prominent personalities from both sides of the battle.

Another important group of primary texts is the war-poetry. Within this group the variety of voices from different regions and ethnic backgrounds is much bigger than within the narrative canon. There are, for instance, poems by authors from northern Nigeria who, as much as they have been affected by the war, have otherwise hardly contributed to this body of literature, at least as far as texts written in English are concerned. One reason for this certainly is the oral and written literary tradition in the Hausa language.

Seen as a whole, all these literary works constitute part of a national discourse on the war and, by extension, on the nation of Nigeria. They reflect the vast uncertainty and uneasiness which has befallen Nigerian intellectual circles with respect to the consequences of the war, long after the political and military decision in favour of national unity had been reached. The question arises how this literature plays its part in "digesting" the strong emotions raised by the war and what fictionalisations of life within a multiethnic, post-colonial society it offers. Texts written by women play an important role within this process which has not been sufficiently recognized.

Women's Literature about the War

Since Flora Nwapa's *Never Again*, which appeared in 1975[5], at least sixteen further literary works on the civil war by Nigerian female writers have been published.[6] Most of these works are written by authors who experienced the war at first hand on the Biafran side and who are Igbo.[7] Apart from Nwapa, all of these authors belong to the second or third generation of writers who started writing only after the war, mostly not even until the mid-eighties. While most of their works deal directly with the civil war and bring into focus the specific situation of women and

[5] Enugu (Nwamife Publishers) rpt. 1979. Shortly after the war, Nwapa, together with Achebe and others, edited a collection of short stories: *The Insider. Stories of War and Peace from Nigeria*, Enugu 1971, and published her own collection *This is Lagos and other Stories*, Enugu 1971, which contains two of her short stories on the civil war.

[6] Rosina Umelo, *Felicia*, London 1978; Flora Nwapa, *Wives At War*, Enugu 1980; Buchi Emecheta, *Destination Biafra*, London 1982; Catherine Obianuju Acholonu, *Nigeria In The Year 1999*, Owerri 1985, and *Into The Heart Of Biafra*, Owerri 1985; Martina Nwakoby, *A House Divided*, Enugu 1985; Rose Adaure Njoku, *Withstand The Storm*, Ibadan 1986; Leslie Jean Ofoegbu, *Blow The Fire*, Enugu 1986; Pauline Onwubiko, *Running For Cover*, Owerri 1988; Eno Obong, *Garden House*, Ibadan 1988; Bridget Nwankwo, *Drums of Destiny*, Ibadan 1991; Omowunmi Segun, *The Third Dimple*, Ibadan 1992; Phanuel Egejunu, *The Seed Yams Have Been Eaten*, Ibadan 1993; Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo, *Echoes In The Mind*, Lagos 1994. Reference has been found to three other early works by women, but copies were unobtainable: Dora Obi Chizea, *Streams and Rivers of Blood: War Poems on Biafra*, New London, CT 1969; Grace Nnenna Nzeribe, *Love in the Battle Storm: A Story of War and Romance*, Enugu 1972.

[7] Buchi Emecheta who has been living in London since 1962, has got her second hand information from relatives; Rosina Umelo and Leslie Jean Ofoegbu are of British origin, married to Igbo-men; Eno Obong is Ibibio and Omowunmi Segun is Yoruba.

children under war conditions (like the novels by Flora Nwapa, *Never Again*, Buchi Emecheta, *Destination Biafra*, Pauline Onwubiko, *Running for Cover*; the personal accounts by Rose A. Njoku, *Withstand the Storm* and Leslie J. Ofoegbu, *Blow the Fire*; the short stories in Nwapa's Wives at War and in Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo's *Echoes In The Mind*; the play *Into the Heart of Biafra* and the war poems in *Nigeria in the Year 1999*, both by Catherine O. Acholonu) there are other texts in which the war only serves as backdrop (like the novels *Felicia* by Rosina Umelo, *Drums of Destiny* by Bridget Nwankwo and *The Seed Yams Have Been Eaten* by Phanuel Egejunu) or which deal with themes directly related to the war, for instance, the consequences of ethnic intolerance (like the novel *A House Divided* by Martina Nwakoby).

Reception

While a considerable volume of criticism on Nigerian civil war literature has been published[8], female authors are completely ignored, with the exeption of Nwapa and Emecheta who, by the time their "war novels" appeared, had already been established writers. However, almost all male commentary on these two women writers views them negatively.

The most frequent reproaches against Nwapa and Emecheta are that their manner of writing is aesthetically dissatisfying and inferior to that of other (male) artists[9]. Moreover, the literary critics accuse them of being too feminist[10], of lacking objective distance from their subject matters and, as a result, of being too emotional[11], or of producing "irresponsible propaganda"[12]. However, all of these reproaches against Nwapa and Emecheta are based rather on superficial than meticulous studies without detailed references to the texts themselves. One wonders whether and how these two writers "disturb" the male discourse on the civil war? The critics seem to regard female representations of war experiences and female commentary on the topic

[8] For example: Chidi Amuta, *The Nigerian Civil War and the Evolution of Nigerian Literature*. In: *Canadian Journal of African Studies*, 1983, 17:1, 85-99; Chidi Amuta, *Literature of the Nigerian Civil War*. In: Yemi Ogunbiyi (ed.), *Perspectives on Nigerian Literature. 1700 to the Present*. Vol. 1, Lagos 1988, 85-92; Steve Ogunpitan (see footnote 2); Willfried F. Feuser, *Anomy and Beyond. Nigeria's Civil War in Literature*. In: *Cultures et développement*, Vol. XVI, 3-4, Louvain-la-Neuve 1984, 783-820; Ernest E. Emenyonu, *Post-War Writing in Nigeria*. In: *Ufahamu* 1973, 4:1, 77-92; Ernest E. Emenyonu, *The Nigerian Civil War and the Nigerian Novel: The Writer as Historical Witness*. In: E. Emenyonu, *Studies on the Nigerian Novel*, Ibadan 1991, 89-105; Femi Osofisan, *The Alternative Tradition: A Survey of Nigerian Literature in English since the Civil War*. In: *Présence Africaine*, 139, 1986, 162-184); Charles E. Nnolim, *Trends in the Nigerian Novel*. In: C.E. Nnolim, *Approaches to the African Novel*, Lagos/Port Harcourt 1992, 189-202; Craig W. McLuckie, *Nigerian Civil War Literature: Seeking an "Imagined Community"*, Lewiston/New York etc. 1990; Theodora Akachi Ezeigbo, *Fact and Fiction in the Literature of the Nigerian Civil War*, Ojo Town, Lagos State 1991; Olu Obafemi, *Nigerian Writers on the Nigerian Civil War*, Ilorin 1992.

[9] Cf. Emenyonu, 1991: 96; Amuta, 1983: 95f; Ogunpitan: 297; Feuser: 792; Ezeigbo: 95.

[10] Cf. Emenyonu, 1973:87; Osofisan:180; Nnolim:197; Amuta, 1983:95; Ezeigbo:100.

[11] Cf. Emenyonu, 1991:96; Ezeigbo:96.

[12] Ezeigbo:85

of warfare as undesirable, at best superfluous. One of the reasons for this disapproval could be that war is generally (even by women[13]) looked at as a "male affair" and associated with politics, heroism, patriotism and battlefields - domains in which women should have no part. Nigerian literary critic Charles E. Nnolim tellingly describes one crucial motive for (male) writing about the Nigerian civil war as the "recapture of Biafran manhood lost in the battlefield"[14], a motive with which the "feminist-liberationists"[15], as he labels Nwapa and Emecheta, could certainly not identify.

There are only a few articles that have paid more serious attention to women's literature about the war[16]. Their main interest is whether there is a "'feminine' perspective"[17] or a "'female' viewpoint"[18] on the civil war and how it differs from male perspectives.[19] While Femi Ojo-Ade (himself a male critic) stresses the woman's "humanism" that enables her to write more faithfully and objectively[20] about the war, Virginia Coulon states that female authors write "in their own language and 'grammar'"[21]. However, both critics fail to give proof to their assertions. According to Coulon texts by women also question certain concepts such as "'enemy'", "'war casualty'" and "explore the meaning of the nation of 'Biafra'. Finally they offer a portrait of the New Nigerian Woman and speculate on what her contribution can be (sic!) to the founding of a New Nation"[22].

Some of these important points will be raised and enlarged in connection with Nwapa's *Never Again* as I seek to answer the following questions: How does Nwapa's female viewpoint towards national reconciliation differ from male perspectives? What conceptions of "enemy" and "friend" does the text construct? How does the text's depiction of war experiences relate to issues of female identity and the role of women in Nigerian society?

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[13] Buchi Emecheta, in the foreword to her novel *Destination Biafra*, Glasgow 1983, p. viii, calls her subject "masculine", but gives a vivid example of the opposite: her heroine Debbie becomes a soldier of the Nigerian army.

[14] C.E. Nnolim, 1992:198.

[15] ibid: 197

[16] Femi Ojo-Ade, *Women and the Nigerian Civil War: Buchi Emecheta and Flora Nwapa*. In: *Etudes Germano-Africaines* 6, 1988, 75-86; Virginia Coulon, *Women at War. Nigerian Women Writers and the Civil War*. In: *Commonwealth Essays and Studies* 13:1, 1990, 1-12; Jane Bryce, *Conflict and Contradiction in Women's Writing on the Nigerian Civil War*. In *African Languages and Cultures* 1991, 4:1 (Special Issue: The Literatures of War, ed. by T.A. Ezeigbo and L. Gunner), 29-42.

[17] Bryce:33

[18] Coulon:2

[19] Cf. Ojo-Ade:76; Bryce:33.

[20] Cf. Ojo-Ade:76

[21] Cf. Coulon:1

[22] Coulon:3

Flora Nwapa

Flora Nwapa was born in 1931 in Oguta (South Eastern Nigeria) where she also died in 1993. In the initial stages of the civil war, together with such authors as Chinua Achebe, Christopher Okigbo, Gabriel Okara among others, Nwapa joined the Biafran side of the conflict. She was "employed in the Transport Directorate in Biafra for a period of nine months"[23]. Her attitude towards Biafra must have changed during the years of warfare. From immediately after the end of military actions until 1975 she was involved with the reconstruction programme of the administration of the East Central State.[24] There she worked under Ukpabi Asika, an Igbo considered "public enemy No. 1"[25] in Biafra because he had stayed on the Nigerian side. Collaboration with the former enemy was considered treason even after the war. Through her active involvement with Nigerian postwar politics Flora Nwapa exposed herself to much criticism by her former Biafran colleagues.[26]

Never Again

The story of her novel *Never Again* depicts the situation in Ugwuta[27], which is about to be captured by Nigerian federal troops. Biafran war propaganda prevents necessary preparations for the evacuation of the town, thereby doubly making life a hell for the inhabitants. Not only are the civilians in town deliberately kept uninformed about the real military situation, but they also live in constant fear of being shot as "sabos", i.e., saboteurs. They hardly dare speak, since any word possibly smacking of criticism or subversion would be considered as sabotage. Consequently, fear, distrust, constant rumours, and an unbearable tension pervade the relations between people even within individual families. The novel gives an account of the dramatic moments before and during the mass flight from Ugwuta as it is conquered by the enemy, the miraculous liberation of the town by the lake goddess Uhamiri, and the return into the destroyed homes. At the centre of the narrative is a woman by the name of Kate who comments on the events from a first-person narrator's point of view.

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[23] Janheinz Jahn et al., *Who's Who in African Literature*, Tübingen 1972, p. 276.

[24] As a member of the Executive Council she was Commissioner for Health and Social Welfare; Lands, Survey and Urban Development; and Establishments. (Cf. Henrietta Otokunefor and Obiageli Nwodo (eds.), *Nigerian Female Writers*, Lagos 1989, p. 28). As Health Commissioner Flora Nwapa closed all state owned orphanages. With this order she appealed to individual selfhelp and selfresponsibility. (Cf. Harneit-Sievers:133; Interview with Flora Nwapa in: *Quality Magazine* Lagos, August 23rd, 1990, p. 31).

[25] Harneit-Sievers (see footnote 1), p. 174.

[26] Together with Asika she became object of caricature in Eddie Iroh's novel, *The Siren in the Night* (London 1982, see for example, p. 112). Both of them are not mentioned by name but can be recognised easily as marionettes of the Gowon's administration.

[27] Engl.: Oguta, Nwapa's hometown.

Kate is a privileged, westernized woman whose attitude towards Biafra changes as the war progresses. Initially an enthusiastic activist for the Biafran cause, Kate has turned into a pessimistic cynic after two years of suffering under warfare and constant displacement. She profoundly detests the war and the mendacious politics which produce it:

> "We lost the war when we lost Port Harcourt. It was sheer madness fighting after Port Harcourt. All right-thinking people knew this. What we should have done was surrender. Surrender; nobody in Biafra could say that word openly and remain alive. (...) Surrender! Surrender and be slaughtered by the Vandals. If we surrendered, we would all be butchered. It was strong and thoughtful propaganda. And... it worked!" (23f)[28]

However, in her home-town Ugwuta there is no one who shares her assessment of Biafra's political and military situation. Even her husband and his friend, who fanatically believe in the Biafran cause, declare her mad and threaten her:

> "Kate! people like you should go into detention and remain there until the end of this war, and the State of Biafra fully established. You are too dangerous." (2)

Although Kate is "genuinely afraid" (3) she is too clever not to see through propaganda and mass psychosis. She is determined to risk neither her own nor her children's lives for an ideal which in her eyes failed long ago, or for a war which is not her own. While on the outside she controls herself, she already braces herself for another war. Her verbal attacks against the blindness and fanatic nationalism of her compatriots are at the same time directed against the patriarchal Igbo-society, in which the views of women are dismissed and ignored although Biafra would have long lost its war without the supportive role of women. The text gives numerous examples of women's war-time activities:

> "The women especially were very active, more active than the men in fact. They made uniforms for the soldiers, they cooked for the soldiers and gave expensive presents to the officers. And they organised the women who prayed every Wednesday for Biafra." (7)

Women work in the civil defence, in the "attack"-trade with the enemy across the front line; they organise the market network, and the "kitchens" for the soldiers. However, such activities neither give women more opportunities for participation in decision-making, nor do they strengthen their position within the community. At best they are "awarded" with "special war reports" (7), which often turn out to be pure propaganda. (61)

One lesson Kate has learned in this war is that she has to take her fate into her own hands. Her motto: "When the time comes to run nobody will tell you." (7) becomes one of her private

[28] All quotations follow the edition published in 1986 by Tana Press Ltd., Enugu.

strategies for survival in this war. Little by little, with a lot of diplomatic skill, she succeeds in persuading her family of the empirical truth expressed in her motto and thus manages to keep the worst harms from them.

Nwapa expresses this aspect very distinctly: It is the women who feel accountable for their private and public attitude. They are the ones to take responsibility in the family as in society at large. While men routinely claim this role for themselves, they nevertheless act differently. The gender hierarchy that forces women to submit to the will of their husbands leads to communal death - as Nwapa shows - in times of crises. Her message is clear: Only when husband and wife respect each other as equal partners they have a chance to survive.

Nwapa's female narrator voices an alternative view of the war which challenges crucial aspects of why the war was necessary and why the cause of Biafra turned into a failure:

> "The war was madness. We were not prepared for this war. We shouldn't have seceded. It was a big miscalculation. (...) No, the Nigerians should not have fought us. We had left Lagos for them. They should have left us in peace in our new found Biafra. We could have built up our Biafra 'where no one would be oppressed'. Was anybody sure of this? 'Where no one would be oppressed?' There was already oppression even before the young nation was able to stand on her feet. Wasn't it even possible that war could have broken out in the young nation if there was no civil war? Perhaps Nigeria did well to attack us. If they hadn't we would have, out of frustration begun to attack and kill one another." (50-51)

The opinion that internal conflicts - a war within the war - were responsible for the defeat of Biafra is shared by many male writers, too. But generally they blame the political leaders of Biafra and the corrupt behaviour of the war profiteers rather than themselves or other "ordinary citizens". Kate's story is not interested in distinguishing between, say, a criminal power elite and a victimized population of well-meaning inhabitants. Although she does in fact hold "old politicians" (7) responsible for the war, she also talks about a collective guilt: "We were all guilty." (59), including herself. This acknowledgement of guilt is linked with the readiness to accept responsibility for it: "We all were collectively responsible. We all must pay collectively for our folly." (80) That is her public message to all former Biafrans and her own strategy of moral survival for the post-war period. In her view, Biafra is guilty of leading a war, without having been prepared for it, and prolonging it at the expense of the civilian population. The guilt of the individual Biafran, for her, is the "blindness" and selfishness of everybody - especially the intellectuals - who are able to know better, but instead deceive and manipulate their own people. In her selfcritical reflection of the events she is even willing to admit that the secession "was a big miscalculation"; she consciously avoids the word "mistake", thereby implying that the secession was an undoubted necessity at the time of the massacres. But she criticises the "genocid"-propaganda which used the killings of "Easterners" as a pretext to wage a war. The word "miscalculation" could also be an indicator for her still existing belief in the ideals of a

"New Nation" (definitely not a second Biafra), an imagined community without oppression, ethnic conflicts, and gender hierarchies.

By dint of these confessions she emphasizes the idea of national reconciliation already mentioned at the beginning of the narrative as the motive of her writing:

> "I wanted to live so that I could tell *my friends on the other side* what it meant to be at war - a civil war at that, a war that was to end all wars." (Italics mine, 1)

"enemy" and "friend" - Who is Who?

There are friends on the other side, but where are the enemies? After all, who is enemy of whom, who is friend of whom? The *Ahiara Declaration* of Biafra states that, "every Biafran is his brother's keeper," but the old Biafran friends (e.g. Kal), by their selfish and irresponsible behaviour, have become enemies of their own civilian population. This charge is directed at them:

> "Why, we were all brothers, we were all colleagues, all friends, all contemporaries, then, without warning, they began to shoot, without warning, they began to plunder and to loot and to rape and to desecrate and more, to lie, to lie against one another. What was secret was proclaimed on the house tops. What was holy was desecrated and abused. NEVER AGAIN." (73)

The novel suggests that "they" are the true "vandals" and "sabos", that is to say, those who pretend to fight imaginary betrayers, for their own soldiers are the ones looting and raping, their own "friends" the ones who plunder and lie and denigrate innocent people as saboteurs in order to have a pretext for imprisoning them.

Kate only cynically refers to the enemies threatening Ugwuta (a mini-Biafra) from the outside as "vandals", thereby using the very name which Biafran propaganda has given to them. However, she does not portray them, as the propaganda wants to make believe, as bloodthirsty vandals wanting to slaughter all Biafrans, but instead depicts them as ordinary soldiers at war. She even describes them as "merciful" (53) for warning the civilians before entering the town.

Telling the story of the war from an explicitly female perspective like Nwapa's means to displace the Manichaean, antagonistic division of the world into 'good' and 'bad', 'friends' and 'enemies', as enforced by the discourse of war propaganda. Nwapa's work conceives of a living together of people in Nigeria which transcends the former political and ethnic boundaries. Her way of representing the war is centred on a future without war and thus contributes to national reconciliation and communal rehabilitation.

Flora Nwapa fictionalises "the other side" of what men call an armed conflict and thus takes the Nigerian civil war as urgent reason to question existing gender, and ethnic hierarchies and to reimagine the relations of the sexes and peoples in her society. The philosophical basis for

female participation in political life is not only imported Western notions of female emancipation but also the traditions of the native culture. By placing the indigenous matriarchal myth of Uhamiri at the center of the novel, Nwapa does not proclaim, however, a retreat to traditional life in the village which could only be patriarchal; on the contrary, she seeks to legitimise female power and the equality of the sexes by unearthing forgotten cultural knowledge of female potency and intervention, and by reinterpreting the traditions of her own culture from a female (or womanist) point of view.[29]

Outlook

Civil war literature by male Nigerian authors often marginalises female characters by portraying them as passive, submissive to authority, or simply as inferior. If women are not decorations in a world completely ordered according to male desire, they are constructed as indicators of the moral decay of society.[30] By contrast, the reader of women's civil war literature obtains a totally different view of women in the war: they tend to be strong, active personalities, leading their families through the daily struggles of both war and post-war periods, and asserting their female identities against the morality of a male-dominated society. The experience of war has made these women strong. Nwapa's ladies in her short story *Wives at War* (1980) demonstrate this when they bluntly tell off the Biafran Foreign Secretary:

> "You wait until the end of this war. There is going to be another war, the war of the women. (...) When this war has ended we will show you that we are a force to be reckoned with."[31]

In my opinion, the principal reason for male rejection of female writing about the civil war has to do with the change of female roles imagined in these texts.

Nigerian civil war literature by women testifies to an empowerment of women on two levels: For one, literary texts by women reflect a real social change, that is to say, the increase in social influence and political power on the part of women owing to a war caused by the disastrous politics of men. Women were forced to develop strategies of survival during the war. They had to learn how to be more independent economically (in particular through the so-called "attack trade"), and they were unintentionally provided with opportunities to choose male partners on their own, experience the 'free' life of the cities, assume new responsibilities, and participate in decision-making from which they used to be excluded. The circumstances of the war taught

[29] cf. Florence Stratton, *Contemporary African Literature and the Politics of Gender*, New York 1994, p. 90.

[30] See, for example, the short story *Girls At War* (1972) by Chinua Achebe, the "War thrillers" by Eddy Iroh, especially *Toads of War* (1979); the novels by Cyprian Ekwensi, Survive the Peace (1976) and *Divided We Stand* (1980); also the latest novel on the civil war, *Drums and the Voice of Death* (Enugu 1996) by Nathan Nkala.

[31] Enugu (Tana Press) 1984, p. 13.

many women how not submit to male power. Most female authors are of one mind that they will never again let themselves be used for male power games.

Secondly, these texts speak of a literary empowerment on the part of women writers. In their civil war novels the new female voices experiment with different selves and new social roles which before were culturally illicit. The gain of social freedom and the finding of new literary voices is clearly interconnected. Flora Nwapa is to be credited with laying the ground for other female writers and encouraging them to tell their stories, to make themselves heard, and not to leave the telling of the war solely to male authors.

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Tailor of Dreams:
Mia Couto's "Sleepwalking Land"

Cornelia Uschtrin

Introduction

I would like to invite you on a journey through a land, torn by 20 years of civil war, leaving at least one generation, which has never known peace. This country, whose destruction has reached almost unimaginable proportions has until now hardly had an opportunity to develop an identity independent from the colonial rule. In this country there are traces of a tradition, a history - traces that arouse curiosity, that ask to be followed and that perhaps show paths to new hopes. These paths may lead to dreams and utopias, which seem impossible in such a place. This country is Mozambique.

As it quite often is the case it is the achievement of the artist to portray such traces - of the author in particular to tell of these traces, to continue the myths and traditions of a land while at the same time breaking their continuity, changing them and above all bringing them into a new language.

In the 1980s there are two names in particular, which stand for a special development in the narrative literature of Mozambique: Ungulani Ba Ka Khôsa, born in 1957, a black author from the province of Sofala, became known for his book "Ualalapi" (published in 1987). With Mia Couto he was awarded the national prize for narrative literature in 1991. Mia Couto, the subject of my paper, was born in 1955, a white author, who became known for his collections of short stories "Vozes Anoitecidas" (1986), "Cada Homem é uma raça" (1990) and his cronicles "Cronicando" (1991) as well as his work in journalism. What is special about the two authors is that they have both developed a very unique poetic language.

My paper is about Mia Couto's first novel "Terra Sonâmbula" (The Sleepwalking Land) which was published in 1992 and is available in German language since 1994. There is as far as I know still no English translation. For this reason I would like to point out that quotes from the text have been translated by me.

From the various possible ways of analysing the novel I have chosen as a category of analysis that of space. Along with those of characters, action and time, this category is one which is repeatedly used in literary analysis in the attempt to decode the symbolism of a text. Thus the spaces in which a narrative takes place give us codified information about the period of the novel, the social origin and the mental state of characters. When we analyse a text we often use this category only in the sense of settings and do not take account that spaces can be

more than the concrete, permanent places where the plot takes place. In a text spaces can be described in such a way that a narrow definition of that category does not make sense.

In my opinion it is an art in itself for a text to be able to outwit the literary critics by not falling into line with the categories and standards they wish to apply but on the contrary showing through the poetic how inadequate such categories can be. Perhaps even showing how far a text can exceed such categories or even dissolve them. This is exactly what happens in the "Sleepwalking Land", when one begins to observe the spaces of the plot more closely. And that is why in my analysis I have tried to use a wider definition of space.

Opening scene

The beginning gives an immediate entry into the scenery of the framework: An apocalyptic image is created of a road marked by war, death and destruction and where hyenas are the witnesses of death. In this place, poisoned by war and death, leaving no hope of life, you can see two figures walking aimlessly along the road: The young Muidinga and the old Tuahir. Both are briefly described: Muidinga has lost his memory after a long illness and Tuahir has taken him and nursed him after finding him half dead in a refugee camp.

They remove the charred dead bodies from a burnt out bus and take refuge there. Very nearby, next to the body of a man who has been shot, they find a suitcase containing notebooks. To pass the time Muidinga starts to read aloud from them.

The journey into an imaginary world begins. Three particular motifs indicate the journey beginning: the road, the bus and the reading. The reading which opens up a "book within the book" is a well known narrative model in literature where it often represents a journey into an imaginary world. Often, and so it is here, the journey is motivated by a flight from the real world (here it is war and destruction) and a search for new ways, for hope and for purpose. If one wished one could even suggest that this novel is actually a text about reading itself, namely what the act of reading makes possible and how an imaginary world can be even more "realistic" than that which we generally term "realistic".

Parallel to the framework plot in the notebooks, which are the diary of a man named Kindzu, a second level of action develops. The structure of the novel is formed by alternating sequences of framework and inner narration. In both strains of the plot a search begins. Muidinga, the main character of the framework, is searching for his origins. He wants to find his memory again and with that his lost identity. Kindzu (the writer of the diary) on the other hand knows his roots quite well, but he leaves his native village disappointed by his family and the events of his youth. He starts searching for the naparamas, who are warriors blessed by the magicians, and are fighting against the war-mongers. His great goal is to put an end to war.

For both protagonists, Muidinga as well as Kindzu, the search takes the form of a journey. But while Kindzu really gets on a boat and leaves, Muidinga and Tuahir travel into an

imaginary world, the world of the diary. But also independent of the notebooks the young Muidinga and the old Tuahir have experiences and live through events, which form relatively complete narratives. Mia Couto, who had previously written mostly in the genres of cronicles and short stories, creates with this novel a mosaic of different single stories which are artistically linked together.

Aspects of the structure

The structure of the novel is strictly dualistic. The framework action corresponds largely to the reality of the war and the diary read by the characters of the frame constitutes an imaginary counterpart. The structure alternates strictly between frame and diary. The diary contains the greater part of the action and describes the life of Kindzu from his childhood to his death. The eleven notebooks represent 11 stations in his life, starting with his childhood and youth in his native village, which he leaves after his father dies, his brother disappears and his mother goes crazy. He decides to become a naparama warrior. His travels lead him to the town of Matimati, which is the central point in the combination of spaces on this level of action. There he meets nearly all further important characters, including his great love Farida, who, however, lives at a distance from the town on a stranded ship. In Matimati Kindzu also meets Quintino, who will become a good friend and his old friend Surendra, the Indian merchant, whom he knows from his village. Because of Farida, Kindzu postpones his goal of becoming a naparama and decides for her sake to find her lost son Gaspar. In this way the action in the diary develops in quite a continuous way. I would like to restrict myself to this short description of the diary content and look more precisely on the events of the framework plot.

Interaction scenery - imagined spaces

Next I would like to concentrate on the changes in the settings and spaces in the framework plot and the role of the reading of the pages of the diary in those changes. The starting point of the journey is the dead road with the burnt out bus, which serves as refuge for the protagonists Muidinga and Tuahir.

In the course of the novel the landscape around the bus changes more and more. Only after a while do Muidinga and Tuahir realize that the landscape around them is moving. First it is a tree that is suddenly standing there one morning, later on in the novel the climate and the whole vegetation will change completely.

I have tried to give a short summary of the predicates in the text which describe the landscape around the bus in the 11 chapters. The scenery at the beginning is described as "dead road"; "ashes", "dust" and "dirty colours" characterize the image. "No sky" seems to be visible. The scenery is described as a withering world, as a savanna where monkey-bread trees grow. In the second chapter (which starts on the morning of the next day, after they have read

from the diary the night before) a goat approaches the place. Suddenly there is also a plum tree with fruit. However, death too remains present: a dying elefant approaches and is compared with the dying country. In the third chapter dew on the grass brings the first sign of green. In the fifth there is an orange tree nearby, low and leafy trees now characterize the landscape, the humidity increases. The land becomes more and more fertile until finally it starts to rain and everything turns green, there is even a cornfield in the area. In the 10th chapter a vast swamp covers the area around the bus and herons circle in the air. They are now near the sea, which they finally reach in the last chapter: "The landscape has reached the sea. The road is now covered by a carpet of white sand."[1]

So as the road around the burnt out bus moves around the world, different climate zones and vegetations pass by. About halfway through the novel Muidinga realizes that there is a connection between the movement of the landscape and the reading of the diary. The movement of the landscape around the bus obeys certain rules. It takes place in the same rhythm as the reading of the notebooks, as a connection is suggested between the imaginary journey of Muidinga through the ficticious world of the notebooks and the changes in the landscape around the bus. Tuahir's interest and fascination for the notebooks starts later, and so only later is he able to notice the changes around the bus. Muidinga's understanding is apparent from a quote from the sixth chapter:

> "A paisagem prossegue suas infatigáveis mudanças. Será que a terra, ela sozinha, deambula em errâncias? De uma coisa Muidinga está certo: não é o arruinado autocarro que se desloca. Outra certeza ele tem: nem sempre a estrada se movimenta. Apenas de cada vez que ele lê os cadernos de Kindzu. No dia seguinte à leitura, seus olhos desembocam em outras visões."[2]

> "The landscape goes on changing tirelessly. Could it be, that the earth is wandering about all on its own? There's one thing Muidinga knows for certain: It's not the ruined bus, that is changing place. Another thing he is sure of: The road isn't moving all the time. Only every time he reads Kindzu's notebooks. The day after reading his eyes meet new landscapes."

The apparently imaginary journey in the burnt out bus on its way through different climates draws an extreme picture: In a place littered with corpses where all hope of life seems to be gone, the reading and the power of imagination create the opportunity to find traces of a living land. The awakening of imagination and fantasy by the notebooks also brings the landscape back to life. Every morning after the reading the location of the two characters has changed without them having in fact moved.

The question is: Is it the landscape that is changing on the basis of the imagination (that is, does the perception of the characters change through reading)? It is suggested that the

[1] Mia Couto: *Terra Sonâmbula.* Lisboa: Caminho 1992, p. 207

[2] a.a.O., p. 109

landscape is the active element, as though dreams are buried in the earth and only need to be dug out. So are these all illusions, the trees, animals, the climate and the strange people Muidinga and Tuahir meet? Are they at the mercy of the landscape and its moods?

If we look at the text, we reach the conclusion that the landscape, the land, the earth have subject status. This means that while the people sleep, the landscape is "wandering about". This of course leads us back to the title of the novel: the "Sleepwalking Land", "Terra Sonâmbula". Later in the novel the actions of the land are described by the ghost of Kindzu's dead father:

> "Você não sabe, filho. Mas enquanto os homens dormem, a terra anda procurar." (...) "É que a vida não gosta sofrer. A terra anda procurar dentro de cada pessoa, anda juntar os sonhos. Sim, faz conta ela é uma costueira dos sonhos."[3]

> "While the people sleep, the land goes searching." (...) "For life doesn't like to suffer. The land goes searching in every person, it joins dreams together. Yes, just as if it were a tailor of dreams."

I think one can at this point take a short quote from Fernando Pessoa's "Book of Disquiet" because he has certainly been an influence on Mia Couto:

> "Nunca durmo: vivo e sonho, ou antes, sonho em vida e a dormir, que também é vida. Não há interrupção em minha consciência: sinto o que me cerca se não durmo ainda, ou se não durmo bem; entro logo a sonhar desde que deveras durmo. Assim o que sou é um perpétuo desenrolamento de imagens, conexas ou desconexas, fingindo sempre de exteriores, umas postas entre os homens e a luz se estou desperto, outras postas entre os fantasmas e a sem-luz que se vê, se estou dormindo. Verdadeiramente, não sei como distinguir uma coisa da outra, nem ouso afirmar se não durmo quando estou desperto, se não estou a despertar quando durmo."[4]

> "I never sleep: I live and I dream or rather I dream both whilst I live and whilst I sleep, which is also life. There is no break in my consciousness: I sense what is around me even when I'm not quite asleep or when I don't sleep well. I start to dream as soon as I'm properly asleep. I'm a perpetual unfolding of connected and disconnected images, always disguised as something external, that stand between men and the light if I'm awake, or between ghosts and the visible dark if I'm asleep. I really do not know how to distinguish one from the other, nor would I venture to affirm that I'm not

[3] a.a.O., p. 195

[4] *Livro do desassossego de Bernardo Soares*. Apresentação crítica de Maria Alzira Seixo. Lisboa 1986, p. 187, fragmento no. 168 (290). - (Bernardo Soares is one of the heteronyms of Fernando Pessoa.)

> sleeping when I'm awake, or that I'm not on the point of waking when I'm asleep."[5]

In a similar way to Pessoa's description the borders between waking and sleep merge in "Terra Sonâmbula", images exist which cannot be identified as dream or reality.

Relation of reality and imagination

Now I would like to take a closer look at these images for showing the relation of reality and imagination in the text. We should first examine the connection between the reading of the diary, the dreams that arise from this, the land and the earth. As we have seen, the land is personified as a wanderer collecting dreams in order to join them together. The fantasies and dreams of the people work as the driving power or motor that keeps the land moving, that is they are the source of life to the land. At the very beginning the dream is also described as the "eye of life". The interesting thing about this notion is the juxtaposition and interaction of the material (the landscape, the road, the earth) and the psychic, or non-material (the dreams, fantasies, imaginings). The movement of the landscape is a leitmotif through the novel. This motif connects the motifs of the journey, the dream, the earth, the land. The landscape is the expression of the earth - its colours, plants and its climate show the liveliness of the place. The descriptions of the landscape are written in a very poetic language full of metaphors. At one place Muidinga compares the barren, sad state of the area with a widow mourning the death of a man who had dreams.

The closing

The area around the burnt out bus becomes dynamic through the reading (and the ability to dream) which breaks the monotony of the steppes. We could suggest that these changes in the space are entirely produced by the imagination of the young Muidinga; the physical change in the space around the bus is after all not possible "in reality". In fact the real level of the framework action gives way more and more to the imaginary level. We can no longer assume that the events of the framework are more real than those in the diary.

Since I have already sketched out the opening scene of the novel, I would now like to briefly describe the end, in particular the allegoric image, with which the novel closes. At the end the two strands of the plot are brought together. In the course of the novel the strong identification of Muidinga with the diarist suggests a relationship between the two. For Muidinga, who has lost his memory, the notebooks become extremely important as they offer him a "substitute identity". His memory also slowly returns through reading. The novel ends finally with Kindzu's visionary dream. He is resigned to his lost love and the failure of his

[5] Fernando Pessoa: *The book of disquiet*. Ed. by Maria José de Lancastre. Translated by Margaret Jull Costa. London 1991, p. 164.

search for his lover's son. He has also given up his aim of becoming a naparama. He decides to go back to his village and has a dream the night before his departure. He has a vision of a road where he is walking. What is special about the road is that it is moving and carrying away the people on it. (So the phenomenon is now also recognized by the character in the diary). He reaches a burnt out bus and at that moment is shot. He drops his suitcase containing the pages of his diary. Then he sees a boy holding the notebooks in his hands and shouts out his name in fright: Gaspar! The boy drops the pages and the wind carries the pages off. They flutter to the ground. The letters turn into grains of sand and the notes become "pages of earth". The transformation of the letters into grains of sand and the entire writings into earth allegorize a particular relationship between imagination and reality. In this image the borders between material and imaginary, between earth and dreams are dissolved. The image is almost religious: with the death of the diarist his writings are consigned to the earth.

We may connect this image with one from the philosopher Walter Bejamin from his "Denkbilder". In his essay "Ausgraben und Erinnern" ("Digging out and Remembering") he compares the memory to the "soil, a medium in which the old cities lie buried. He who attempts to approach his own buried past must behave like a man digging. In this way, real memories must not so much report but describe the place in which the researcher got hold of them."[6]

Perhaps Muidinga behaves unwittingly like an archaeologist who rummages in the earth by reading the diary. On the way towards identification with the diarist and the story in the diary he comes to remember parts of a history and a culture that seemed to be lost on the dead road. In this way he comes to an identity which (even if it is "borrowed") becomes reality for him. At the end of the book it seems perfectly clear that he himself is Gaspar, the boy whom Kindzu was looking for, so that he has read his own story in the notebooks. Whether, however, the characters Muidinga and Gaspar are in fact identical cannot be proved and is of no importance for the message of the novel. It is enough that a complete identification of Muidinga with the diary comes about. There is no longer a need to differentiate between the assumed and the authentic identity. The reading, which gives him space for imagination, also enables him to change his perception of his own reality. Events happen there which go beyond the 'real' world, which seem mysterious and fantastic.

Combination of characters

The dualistic construction of the novel can also be seen in the combination of characters. Many characters have an imaginary counterpart. For example the father-son-conflict in the diary reflects the relationship between Muidinga and Tuahir in the framework story. Also inside the diary one can find many dual combinations. For example the twins Carolinda and

[6] Walter Benjamin: Ausgraben und Erinnern. Essay aus den 'Denkbildern'. In: *Schriften* I, Frankfurt am Main 1972, S. 400.

Farida. As twins they were believed to be unlucky and were separated and grew up without knowing of each other. Farida is described as a dream creature, who has an unreal beauty and doesn't seem to age. To Carolinda, who doesn't recognize her sister, she is a rival and represents a danger. Carolinda is the first lady in the village, Farida flees from the village to a stranded ship. There she becomes the object of hate and fascination at the same time. The character of Farida acts as the dark, imaginary reflection of Carolinda. She succeeds in escaping from the hell of the village which represents the absurdity of corruption, power games, racism and famine. For successfully fleeing Carolinda hates Farida. Farida longs for a ship to come and carry her away to another world, a longing for which she must pay with her life.

Thus in the combination of the characters too, the dualistic principle of the novel is continued. Reality and dreams are interwoven and the imagination is played with throughout the novel. But the dualistic structure works as framework which always gives readers the security of knowing on which level they find themselves at a particular point in time. The confusion of reality and fiction is an important theme of the novel, which is not in fact carried through by the author as the relatively rigid form he uses doesn't permit this.

With his deliberate confusion of the material and fantasy and the smudging of the borders between reality and dreams we might suspect that Mia Couto would postulate an inner exile as a solution to the reality of misery and war. Mia Couto certainly doesn't show himself in this novel as a political author or a severe critic of the existing system. Nevertheless themes such as the absurdity of war, the corruption and craving for power of politicians as well as racism and the question of national identity run through the book. With his poetic language he manages to create powerful, hopeful images which aim to convince us of the power of story telling.

Summary

The analysis of the categories of settings and space has shown that it is difficult to deal with a fixed definition of that category. The novel offers a very wide and often bafflingly playful treatment of that category which makes it more interesting if we consider that in literary analysis space and settings are often seen as the most accessible category(-ies). The analysis has shown that in contrast to mere settings we find a representation of that category that is made from a certain perspective. The representation of these spaces changes in the course of the novel and becomes more and more subjective. Landscapes and nature are represented as they are perceived. And the perception changes in conjunction with the reading of fiction. This results in an often allegorical interaction of nature, land, landscape with the subjective feelings and states of mind of the protagonists.

In this novel Mia Couto attempts to counter the violence of war with an idea based on the power of imagination and the perception of another reality. The madness of war, the

continuous presence of death and destruction should be broken by discovering new places with the help of dreams and imagination. The characters in the framework not only manage to flee a short distance from the reality of war. In their mental exile they can develop an individual identity that leads to a different perception of their world. I would like to conclude my presentation with a thought from Fernando Pessoa:

"The truth is that the end of the world like its beginning is our conception of the world. In us the landscapes are landscapes. That is why I create them by imagining them; when I create them, they exist; when they exist, I see them like the others. Why travel? Where else would I be in Madrid, in Berlin, in Persia, in China or at both poles but inside myself and in my kind of perceptions? Life is what we make of it. Journeys are the travellers. What we see is not what we see but what we are."[7]

[7] Pessoa: *The book of disquiet*, a.a.O. p. 222, fragment no. 180 (387).

Alhaji Umaru's Unedited Prose Writings

Stanisław Piłaszewicz

From 15th September till 13th December, 1995 the present author, on invitation of Prof. H. Jungraithmayr from the Institute of African Linguistics of the J. W. Goethe University in Frankfurt, and thanks to the generosity of Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft, had the great privilege to work on Hausa *Ajami* manuscripts containing very valuable prose writings of Alhaji Umaru (1858–1934). Those manuscripts had been written at the beginning of the present century on request of A. Mischlich, a missionary and then colonial officer on the territories of present–day Ghana and Togo (Meyer–Bahlburg 1994:562 ff.). After his return to Germany, in the 1930s he handed over a number of manuscripts dealing with Hausa history (including an autobiography of Umaru) to H. Sölken who edited some of them (1937, 1939, 1959), and the rest, eleven prose writings, were left for future researchers.

As for Alhaji Umaru, known among his relatives and in his community in Kete–Krachi as Imam Imoru, and often referred to by his full arabised name as ʿUmar ibn Abū Bakr ibn ʿUthmān ibn ʿAlī al–Kabbawī al–Kanawī, he received thorough Islamic education in his native town of Kano, and then in Sokoto, Gwandu and Argungu. From there he travelled west to the lands of Zabarma, Songhai, Dendi, Gurma, Mossi and Gurunsi. In 1892, he settled down in the trading town of Salaga (where his brothers and a sister lived) and founded his own religious school. There he met the well–known German traveller, trader and scholar Gottlob Adolf Krause, known among the Hausas as Malam Musa (Markov, Sebald 1963; Sebald 1972). Although the two men separated in 1894, they continued to be in a letter contact.

After the ending of the Salaga civil war over a regional Gonja chieftaincy with its capital in Kpembe, and as a result of the destruction of that town (which became the main battle–field in the war) by German colonial troops, in 1896 Umaru was forced to move to Kete–Krachi, a new important market that developed after Salaga's decline.

Welcomed by his students, friends and relatives, he was offered, around 1900, the office of Imam, thanks to an active support of A. Mischlich. This inaugurated a years–long co–operation between the two men. For many years they used to meet almost every day. Mischlich treated Imam Umaru with the greatest esteem and characterized him in his writings as an extraordinary man:

> "Mein Hauptgewährsmann war für viele Jahre der intelligente und sehr begabte Imam Umaru aus Kano, der die Haussaländer und den Sudan

> durchzogen, dann in Salaga gewohnt hatte und zuletzt in Kete in Togo gelandet war. Im Jahre 1913 unternahm er eine schon lange geplante Pilgerfahrt nach Mekka. Er kannte den ganzen Koran auswendig und sprach fertig arabisch. Deutsch oder englisch verstand er nicht, wir verkehrten daher stets in der Haussasprache miteinander. Er war im Besitz einer reichhaltigen Bibliothek mit vielen Kommentaren zum Koran. [...] Imam Umaru hatte einen großen Teil Afrikas gesehen und kennen gelernt, seinen geistigen Horizont außerordentlich erweitert und konnte schier jeden gewünschten Aufschluß geben. Er kannte sehr genau die Geschichte seines Landes, besonders seit dasselbe von den Fulbe beherrscht wurde und hat mir selbst einzelne Teile derselben schriftlich übergeben, die z.T. in den Mitteilungen des Seminars für Orientalische Sprachen in Berlin veröffentlicht wurden" (Mischlich 1929:13).

In the introduction to his edition of religious and secular songs of the Muslims, A. Mischlich (1943:129) avowed that Imam Umaru had a great knowledge. He stated that no one of the Islamic learned men in his country could compete with Umaru in learning and erudition. He continued to say:

> "Als ich Leiter des Bezirks Kete–Kratschi war, war nun Imam Umaru viele Jahre oft mein täglicher Berater. Nach vielen Aussprachen mit ihm, veranlaßte ich ihn, eine große Menge wichtiger Manuskripte niederzuschreiben. Das zu behandelnde Material wurde eingehend mit ihm besprochen"(Mischlich 1943:130).

Mischlich was even more enthusiastic about Alhaji Umaru in his work on cultures in the Central Sudan:

> "Daß dieser Mann keine alltägliche Erscheinung ist, beweisen seine Kenntnisse in allen Zweigen afrikanischen Kulturlebens. Man ist erstaunt, wie er überall so genau Bescheid weiß und gut unterrichtet ist.
> [...] Nachdem wir viele Jahre, oft täglich, miteinander verkehrten und er mein Hauptgewährsmann bei der Erforschung der Haussasprache war, war ich zuletzt mit ihm zusammen in Misahöhe in Mitteltogo, wo ich ebenfalls das Bezirksamt verwaltete. Er war mir auch hier eine große Hilfe bei der Fortsetzung meiner Erkundungen über mohammedanische Sitten und Gewohnheiten. Von Misahöhe aus trat er eine Pilgerreise nach Mekka an. Von da an habe ich nichts mehr von ihm gehört und jede Spur von ihm verloren. Es scheint, daß er auf dieser gefahrvollen Reise verschollen ist" (Mischlich 1942:VII).

In a letter to H. Sölken dated 13th September, 1946 Mischlich once more pointed to the great scholarship of Imam Umaru and further confirmed a previous statement that it was him who directed the Hausa learned man at what he had to write:

> "Ohne mich wären diese Ms. nie zustande gekommen. Ich übersetzte sie alle: ins Englische. Der Imam wurde von mir bezahlt, er erhielt monatlich

> 30 RM in bar. Daneben liess ich ihm ein schönes Wohnhaus in Kete bauen. Ausserdem bekam er oft noch Stoffe, Zeuge u. Lebensmittel."

Mischlich was wrong saying that Imam Umaru got lost during his long–lasting (1913–1918) pilgrimage to the Holy Towns of Islam. According to Ghanaian Muslims, in Arabia he changed his religious affiliation from the Qādiriyya to the Tijāniyya brotherhood, and then became a well–known *muqaddam* (initiator) of that new Sufi order (Stewart 1965:34). But, indeed, only scarce information concerning Umaru's life after his return from the pilgrimage is at our disposal. We learn from his poetic output that, some time after 1923, his beloved son Al–Ḥājj Labbu (who had accompanied him on the pilgrimage), died; he continued visiting Hausa communities (*zangunàa*) on the Gold Coast territory, he was teaching and taking care of the Muslim religion in Kete–Krachi.

At that time Alhaji Umaru came into contact with a third European scholar, Robert S. Rattray. Rattray went as far as to call himself a humble disciple of Imam Umaru, whom he considered one of the most prominent learned men and teachers of Hausa origin. He even expressed the opinion that Alhaji Umaru was a writer known for his erudition and learning all over West Africa, wherever Hausa was spoken. According to him, Umaru's translations of the poems (*qāsā'id*) composed by Imru'l–Qays (a well–known Arabic poet of the *jāhiliyya* period) into Hausa were much better than any translation of them into European languages (Rattray 1934).

Alhaji Umaru was not only a translator, but also became famous as a very gifted poet who used to compose both in Hausa and Arabic. More than twenty poems are attributed to him which attract attention of the scholars. Thematically, they can be grouped into political poems (e.g. describing the civil war in Salaga or lamenting the arrival of the Christians and enumerating towns and states conquered by them), religious poems (homilies and polemics), praise–poems (including those secular in character), thanksgiving poems, elegies and poetical comments on social problems: some of them are elaborations of the Arabic prototypes. The poetry of Alhaji Umaru may be described as a vehicle of social commentary and criticism, and as reflections on the history of that time. According to T. Hodgkin, his writings seem to be as significant for the understanding of recent social and political history of the Central and Western Sudan as the writings of H.G. Wells and A. Bennet for the history of Great Britain (Hodgkin 1966:443). Some of his Hausa poems have been edited by this author (1974, 1975, 1993), one has been commented upon by M.B. Duffill (1986), and the whole poetic opus was discussed in my work published in 1980.

A substantial part of Umaru's prose writings was already edited and commented upon by German scholars: A. Mischlich, J. Lippert, H. Sölken, and recently by S. Reichmuth. All of Umaru's prose writings edited (except the one edited by Reichmuth) have been re–arranged, translated into English and commented upon in a Ph. D. dissertation by D.E. Ferguson (1973).

When staying in Frankfurt, we had the privilege and honour to work on eleven Umaru's autographs in *Ajami*, covering some 150 pages altogether. We managed to transcribe them

into the Latin script and to provide a critical apparatus. A draft translation into English was also done and thoroughly commented upon (some 770 annotations), although there are still many place- and personal names, as well as historical and cultural facts left to be researched and explained. Unfortunately, lack of time did not allow us to accomplish the task until now.

Generally speaking those manuscripts provide us with much information scarcely or not at all known so far. They refer to the cultural, social and political history of a considerable part of West Africa, far beyond Hausaland. Some of them present various local events in detail, others shed light on facts which in official documents (like the chronicles of Kano, Sokoto and Zamfara,or some other historical writings) are presented in a concise or even laconic style, and seem to be seriously censored. We have the impression that Umaru's accounts are reliable historical sources and they are not devoid of considerable literary value. Alhaji Umaru was of Hausa origin, and as a learned man obviously oriented himself towards the Fulani ideology coined by their Holy War (1804–circa 1810). However, his ethnic affiliation prevailed over the feeling of common Muslim interests. In other words, his attitude towards the Fulani conquerors was by no means enthusiastic. Alhaji Umaru proved to be a sober and objective censor of reality which surrounded him, or the more distant one which was interpreted by him on the basis of the experiences and reports of other people. Therefore, his prose writings are of the greatest importance for bringing the image of the 19th century events in Central and Western Sudan much closer to their true dimension.

From among eleven manuscripts being at my disposal the autobiography of Imam Umaru (7 folios, 14 pages) deserves to be mentioned first. Besides some general remarks on different stages of Umaru's life up to 1901 (which have already been known to some extent), there are many others of considerable value for the political, social and cultural history of Kano. One can find in it some details concerning the forefathers of Umaru; a vivid description of Tudun Maƙera, his town–ward, with a genealogy of *Sarakunan maƙèeraa* ("Chiefs of the smiths"); an image of their compound and of the other, small one destined for their slaves and domestic animals; a humorous presentation of children's plays and games; references to the town gates; information on executions and mutilation of thieves, and on the functioning of the market. Of great importance are descriptions of non–royal offices (e.g. *Sarkin Azàaraa*, *Sarkin Jakara* and *Sarkin Hanyàa*) and of a big famine in Kano which seems to have inspired the "Song of Poverty and of Wealth" (Piłaszewicz 1974). From other events such like the execution of judges, the so–called "quiver order", and the civil war in Salaga were dealt with. Umaru's meetings with, and his relations to two German scholars, G.A. Krause and A. Mischlich, are of considerable interest, too. Here is a reference to Malam Musa (G.A. Krause):

> "At that time, when Salaga had been broken, there was a Christian in the compound of Ahmadu ɗan Zabarma. He was called Malam Musa, and he had known my younger brother since [their meeting] in the Mossi and Gurunsi [countries]. Well, as for him, he did not run away. When I had come back there, before we had deposited our goods, my younger brother went and greeted him. As for him, Malam Musa, he asked him saying: 'Oh,

> are you here?' He answered: 'I arrived just now with my elder brother'. He (Malam Musa) asked: 'Where is he?' He answered: 'He is here'. He said: 'Well, you see, I have none but a single servant whose name is Dan Jimma. As far as tasks are concerned, I have got too much work. I want you to come here, close to me, you and your elder brother. As for you, you will be my servant, whereas your brother will be my friend'". [...] We were living with Malam Musa, compound to compound. It was thus until we became very close to each other. I used to write for him fables, stories and fictitious texts. I improved for him various samples of the speech which the Hausa people had presented to him and which had not been correct" (f° 7 r., p. 14).

Further on, one can find a description of the trading activities of G.A. Krause. The first encounter with A. Mischlich is mentioned in a laconic way:

> "So I entered Kete. [...] I have stayed here until now, it is five years and five months. The name of the European who came to our place is Dogo. Now we are very close to each other. He has even given us many books, and we thank him" (f° 7 v., p. 14).

Three manuscripts from the unedited Mischlich's collection refer to the prehistory and history of Sokoto.

The one provisionally entitled *Proto–Fulani* and Fulani (3 folios, 6 pages) contains information on the legendary origin of the Fulanis and their language. It mentions the migration of a certain Muhammadu into the Hausa country and provides the genealogy of Shaykh Usman dan Fodio. Then the clash between Waru Kunkunbana (a Gobir war–leader) and Abdussalami in Gimbana is described which was the direct reason of the outbreak of the Holy War. Further on one can find an enumeration of those towns and countries conquered by the Fulanis, as well as the names of the most important flag–bearers and captains. Of great importance are also data on the Shaykh's family, especially on his parents who up to now have been rather shadowy figures in the Fulani historical writings.

The second manuscript on Sokoto known as *Sokoto I* (3 folios, 5 pages) is a continuation of the contents of the first one and describes the events which happened after the accomplishment of the Holy War. It comprises a six years' sojourn of Shaykh Usman dan Fodio in Sifawa; his judicious division of the conquered countries between his son Bello and his brother Abdullahi, disregarding Abdussalami; Abdussalami's taking up residence in Kware; hostilities between Abdullahi and his nephew Bello after Shaykh Usman's death over the succession to the Caliphate; Abdussalami's rebellion against the Fulani leaders and the conquest of Kware by Bello; an incident in Kalembina which brought about the reconciliation between Bello and Abdullahi; war against Iyura, a Tuareg chief; the division of Kebbi country between the Fulanis; the submission of the Arewa province to the Fulanis; regaining the independence of Kebbi by prince Nabame and the prince's death.

The manuscript known as *Sokoto II*, which is in fact *Sokoto III*, is quite large (11 folios, 21 pages). Its contents are diverse: the foundation of Sokoto by Bello in 1909; the etymology of its name; Shaykh Usman's removal from Sifawa to Sokoto; the division of Sokoto into two towns: Sabon Birni and Tsofon Birni; an information on Nana (the Shaykh's daughter) and her marriage to Gidadɔ whose offsprings have held the office of *wàziirì* in Sokoto up to date; Gidadɔ's madness; the second marriage of Nana to Dabo, Emir of Kano; the revolt of Buhari ɗan Dubi, Emir of Hadɛjiya, who humiliated numerous allied forces that were sent to suppress the rebelion; Buhari's effort to conquer the Bedde people; the Fulani wars in Zamfara country; the foundation of Wurno as a fortress of Bello against the Gobir people; quarrels between brothers in the Shaykh's family; the signing of a peace–treaty between the Fulanis and Borno; rebellions of the Habe kings during the reign of Caliph Aliyu Babba; the dispute between Aliyu and the Emir of Gwandu over a beautiful woman named Utiya. The final part of the manuscript (3 folios) is entitled "The Kings of Kano" and provides names of the Kano rulers starting from the legendary Bagauda, up to Abbas ɗan Abdu (1903–1919).

The next group of the manuscripts are those dealing with the Hausa emirates and their territories. The manuscript known as "*Kano*" (4 folios, 8 pages) starts with the description of a year–long interregnum in Kano after the Fulani Holy War due to a competition for the kingship between Sulaimanu and Dabon Dambazau. Then the following episodes are dealt with: a slave official Ɗan Rimi from a Habe regime becomes an adviser of Sulaimanu in subduing Dabon Dambazau and some other independent mallams; the abandonment of the title *Moodibbo* ("learned man") by Sulaimanu and acceptance of *Sarkii* ("king"); the imprisonment of Dabon Dambazau and Shaykh Usman's interference in that case; Kano wars against Ɗan Tunku; Kano war with Shaykh Al–Kanemi who wanted to reestablish the Borno overlordship, and the humiliation of Emir Dabo; the rebellion of three Kano mallams and their activities in the Afa and Warji countries.

The manuscript dealing with the events in Katsina numbers 3 folios (5 pages). It comprises the following data: conquest of Katsina by Umaru Dallaji, a Fulani flag–bearer; escape of the Habe princes to Damagaran; oppression of the Hausa people by the Fulani governors; uprising of the oppressed Hausas in Maradi and their founding of the Habe dynasty of Katsina in that town; rebellion of Ɗan Mari from the Habe dynasty and his invasion in Katsina; struggle of the allied forces of the Fulani emirs with the rebels. At the end of the manuscript there is a comparison of some offices found in Katsina with those in Maradi.

The third manuscript of the series seems to have been at the disposal of K. Krieger when he was writing his valuable work on the history of Zamfara (Krieger 1959). For some unknown reasons he was rather scarcely referring to it. The manuscript is composed of 3 folios (6 pages), and deals with questions like: unability of the Fulanis to capture the Zamfara towns by force; foundation of the walled town of Zurmi as the capital of that part of Zamfara which was under Fulani rule; migration of Namoda and foundation of the town known as Kaura Namoda; wars of Caliph Bello against Bakura and description of his failure; history of Anka, the capital

of the Zamfara country under Haƃe rule; wars of the Caliphs Atiƙu and Aliyu in the Zamfara country; genealogy of the Katsina royal "houses" living in Sokoto.

The next two manuscripts deal with the influence of the Fulani Holy War on the neighbouring countries: Nupe and Masina.

The Nupe manuscript numbers 5 folios (9 pages) and presents the following events: activities of a Fulani learned man Isa (known as Dendo) in the Nupe country; Dendo's marriage to a Nupe princess; conflict between Mallam Dendo and another Fulani learned man known as Abdurrahmani; information on seven sons of Mallam Dendo; Mallam Dendo as a leader of the Fulanis living in the Nupe country; succession of his son Usman Zaki to the rule, taking over the regalia of Nupe by Usman Zaki and his becoming the *Etsu* of Nupe; quarrels and fightings between Dendo's sons causing the intervention of the Emir of Gwandu; revolts of the Nupe people against the Fulani rule; significance of an ambitious Hausa mercenary Umar for the history of Nupe; genealogy of the Fulani rulers in Nupe until the arrival of the Europeans.

The manuscript on Masina (4 folios, 7 pages) begins with the description of the Holy War of Seku Amadu who – under the influence of events in Hausaland – founded a theocratic state Dina with its capital in Hamdullahi, on the territory of the so–called Niger bend. Further on, however, it concentrates on the person of Al–Ḥājj ʿUmar Tall (1794–1864), a Tukulor, founder of a great empire. The manuscript contains, i.a., letters, not devoid of literary value, exchanged between Al–Ḥājj ʿUmar and the ruler of Masina, and between the latter and Atiƙu, the Caliph of Sokoto.

As for the remaining two manuscripts, the largest ones, the author himself avows that when writing them he made use of some written sources at his disposal. The manuscript on the Dagomba kingdoms spreads over 15 folios (29 pages) and provides us with the following information: linguistic relation of five Gur languages by comparing the shape of some words; origin of the Dagomba people from the Zamfara country; Bagale as the cradle of the Dagombas; dependence of Dagomba on the Gonja country; liberation of the Dagomba by Na Zangina at the beginning of the 18th c., foundation of Yendi, the capital of Dagomba; dependence of the Dagomba on the Ashanti;internal quarrels and struggles starting from the middle of the 19th c., madness of King Yakubu; rebellion of Kuwatiri Lagafu, a village head; appointment of Kundu Gunda to the chieftaincy of Karaga which causes a civil war; rebellion of Abdullahi and his accession to the "skin", i.e. chieftaincy of Yendi; a failed expedition against the Bassari people; genesis of the *Gamaji* office; rule of Andani; revolt of the Kumbungu king and the arrival of the Europeans.

The manuscript on the Gurunsi people is the largest one as it numbers 21 folios (41 pages). At the very beginning it describes the dependence of the Hausa countries on the Songhai empire: history of the Hausa province known as Arewa; service of Isa, Arewa's prince to the king of Songhai by smelting iron ore; settling of Isa in the place of Dolbizan (an Isala town) and the origin of the Isala people. Further on one can find a description of various Gurunsi

peoples, containing many linguistic remarks; presentation of the Zabarma conquests in the Gurunsi country in the company of the Gonja and Dagomba peoples,and a discussion on the relations between the Zabarmas and Dagombas in a historical perspective.

The prose writings of Alhaji Umaru are not merely historical sources or chronicles, but also literary works of a considerable aesthetic value. It would be appropriate to examine their stylistic aspects on the basis of Ingarden's and Mayenowa's theories. But this has to be postponed to another occasion.

As far as the perception of reality is concerned, Umaru's prose writings are much more informative than the official court chronicles. Let us compare his presentation of the Kano history with that contained in the canonical Kano Chronicle (*Labarun* 1979). As far as the reign of Emir Sulaimanu Ɗan Abama (1807–1919) is concerned, in both sources his difficulty concerning access to the throne, and his conflict with the independent Fulani mallams constitute an axis of the plot. The Kano Chronicle claims that the Fulani did not allow Sulaimanu to enter the palace, lest he begot children who would stick to the old Hausa customs and habits. There is no mention in it about the rivalry between Sulaimanu and Dabon Dambazau for the kingship which caused a year–long interregnum. In the Kano Chronicle it is stated in a laconic way: "Certain man from among the other inhabitants of Kano said to him: 'If you do not enter the Rumfa's house you will not be able to rule over the Kano people, be it in Kano city, or in the country'" (*Labarun* 1979:43 ff.). The chronicler, who must have represented the interests of the Fulanis, did not even mention that the man was connected with the Haɓe dynasty. Umaru is more specific and informative:

> "Well, at that time there was an influential slave of Alwali, the King of Kano, whose name was Ɗan Rimi. When Alwali ran away, he did not follow him. He used to come from time to time and greet Sulaimanu, because he had known him even before (Sulaimanu) went to Shaikh Usman. Well, when that quarrel took place, he (Ɗan Rimi) came to Sulaimanu at night and told him:
> 'Sulaimanu, you know, indeed, how is that whole ruling in Kano. It is done only with the use of strength, police, and some influential slaves of different kinds. As for you, now I see you are (too) mild,and that is why one day you will be weeping and shedding tears'. Sulaimanu asked: 'Well, what shall I do?'
> He (Ɗan Rimi) told him: 'If you appoint me, I will improve (it) for you'" (Ms Kano, f° 1 v. and 2 r.).

An anonymous author of the Kano Chronicle was not ready to avow that the Fulani rulers from the very beginning were forced to recur to the Haɓe institutions and habits against which they had been fighting quite recently. He tries to explain the quarrel between Sulaimanu and Dabon Dambazau with their rivalry over a Sokoto woman, whereas Umaru unmasks Dabon's claims to the kingship and his insubordination to the ruling Emir.

The Kano Chronicle passes in silence over some events which could be troublesome for the Fulani dynasty. One of them is a Borno invasion in the Kano emirate. In 1825–26, during the reign of Ibrahim Dabo in Kano (1819–1846), Shaykh Al–Kanemi of the Kanembu tried to regain the old Borno ascendancy over the Hausa states. He brought down an expedition and threatened Kano. The Kano people succeeded in diverting this invasion southwards, and a little later, in 1826, Yakubu, the Emir of Bauchi, defeated the Borno army and drove back its warriors. This event was not omitted by Umaru who described it in the following way:

> "In his (Dabo's) time also Shaikh Al–Kanemi set out with a large army in order to come to Kano. Dabo, the King of Kano, heard the news and sent a message to Yakuba, the King of Bauchi, asking him for help. Now, Yakuba came out. Also the King of Kano set out, and he made the war–camp in Dutsin Gadawur.
>
> He had twenty thousand horses. He was there when one night he heard bad news, a terrifying one. He mounted his horse at night, he alone, only with a single *zagii*. He made straight for the walled town of Kano and left his war–camp behind. That is why he was put into a song ridiculing him" (Ms Kano f° 3 v. and 4 r.).

It should be added that the unfamous escape of Dabo from the battle–field has not been mentioned in *Kano ta Dabo Cigari* (Dokaji 1958:43) as well.

The cowardice of the Fulani war–leaders and warriors is shown and ridiculed also in other Umaru's manuscripts. Let us give one example concerning the well–known revolt of Buhari ɗan Dubi, the Emir of Haɗejiya in the years 1848–50, and 1851–63. He used to raid the brother emirates and that is why Aliyu Babba, the Sultan of Sokoto, decided to depose him:

> "It was at that time that Aliyu, the Head of Believers, told *Waziiri* Abdu ɗan Nana: 'Go to Kano and tell the King of Kano – Usman, and the King of Zaria – Muhamman Sani, and the King of Katsina – Muhamman Bello that they assemble and make war on Buhari ɗan Dubi, the King of Haɗeja. [...] They all assembled in order to make war on Buhari ɗan Dubi. Now, when they got ready for the battle with Buhari, he drove away all (their) armies in the twinkling of an eye. They returned home dispersed, no one knew which way took the other one. [...] During that flight, if a thorn seized hold of a man's burnous, or his fez, or his turban, he fired at it thinking it was a man (who tried to catch him). This war humiliated people very much, and they have been talking (about it) until today'" (Ms Sokoto II, f° 2 r. and 2 v.).

We could multiply such examples which clearly point out that Umaru's writings are historical sources of prime importance which contain more reliable information than any other of the official Hausa chronicles. Those chronicles are less truthful as they must have been considerably censored in the emirs' courts. Alhaji Umaru, on the contrary, had the freedom to write, and wrote what he knew. Although a learned Muslim, he need not conceal any

malpractices or shameful behaviours of the ruling Fulani dynasties as he himself was of Hausa origin, and was brave enough to stick to the truth.

There are some instances where the literary message of Umaru is characterized by a certain ambiguity as it seems. This phenomenon has already been observed in his poetry. Let us refer to it before we enter into a deeper analysis of his prose writings. At the end of his poem "The Arrival of the Christians" there is a laudatory fragment, praising the Christians (= English colonial officers):

> Hear, listen attentively to this composition:
> I want to describe the character of the Christians.
>
> The grass has been weeded and swept in the town,
> And that is a good deed of the Christians.
>
> The roads have been improved, they go on endlessly,
> Even the bridges have been built thanks to the Christians.
>
> They have repaired all the markets, and made them clean,
> They changed market stalls – it's the Christians' deed.
>
> Peace reigns here, there is no plundering,
> And there is no swindle in the Christians' doings.
>
> Everyone pays you money which he owes to you,
> But if he refuses, go to the Christians.
>
> There is no fighting in the Christians' times,
> There is no brawl, no punching – thanks to the Christians.
>
> If some people fight, they are captured quickly
> And taken to be examined in front of the Christians.
>
> [...] As for me, I thank God for their times, because
> They have treated me kindly, the Christians.
>
> As for me, their rule may last for ever,
> Because I feel enjoyment under the rule of the Christians.
>
> (Piłaszewicz 1975:101 ff.)

One is really surprised, if not shocked, to read such verses in praise of the "Christians" in a poem which is one in a series of anticolonial works, both in Hausa and Arabic. Of course, one could be tempted to suspect that those laudatory fragments could have been added by some copyists. However, it seems rather unlikely, as such favorable views of the "Christians" have been more or less preserved in all the copies at our disposal. Umaru had been working with different Europeans for many years, and as an objective observer he might have expressed the

afore–mentioned opinions. Do they reflect his genuine feelings? In the same poem there are some metaphorical verses:

> We can describe metaphorically the Christians' arrival:
> The dog has eaten the hyena – thanks to the Chistians.
>
> The she–cat feels safe on the wild cat's road:
> She abuses him – thanks to the Christians.
>
> Also the hare has come to boast in front of the lion:
> He abuses him thanks to the presence of the Christians.
>
> Although the dog has done wrong, he is singing,
> And waving his tail – thanks to the Christians.
>
> [The dogs] are wrenching the locks of the lion,
> And chewing them – thanks to the Christians.
>
> So the big monkey has taken a cudgel,
> And strikes the leopard – thanks to the Christians.
>
> Likewise the hen and her children – the chickens:
> They approach the kite – thanks to the Christians.
>
> They abuse her, as well as the hawk, her husband,
> And say: "We do not fear because of the Christians".
>
> Look at the billygoat – it has taken a whip,
> And lashes the jackal – thanks to the Christians.
>
> The mice have gathered and they celebrate
> Their marriage in the Christians' day.
>
> The cat is their bride–washer – imagine it!
> Could such feast be done if not thanks to the Christians!
>
> (Piłaszewicz 1975:104 ff.)

All those events in the world of the animals are obviously against the laws of nature. Alhaji Umaru seems to complain in a subtle way that the "Christians" destroy an established social order: the master of a slave, and the slave himself, they have the same rights; the adult and the child are equal for the "Christians". The message of the poem is probably best summarized by the author himself:

> There is a comfort in their ruling,
> And there is annoyance in the Christians' rule.

There is further evidence that the words in praise of the "Christians" should be understood as a deep irony rather than an eulogy. In an Arabic elegy (composed sometime between 1923 and 1932) on the death of Al–Ḥājj Labbū, a son of the poet, the author is anxious about the rapid changes in Moslem communities, precipitated by the contacts with foreign culture and West European civilization. He uses a similar imagery as in the poem "The Arrival of the Christians":

> I am really afraid that if we live long,
> We shall see a rat that commands and rules the cat.
>
> Or we shall see a lion that runs away from a bad cat,
> And an audacious he-goat that horns the wolf.
>
> Or chicken disregarding the voice of the bird of pray,
> And saying: "Come on", but the bird will not move.
>
> (Piłaszewicz 1980:219)

Having suggested that the ambiguities in the literary message constitute one of the poetic devices of Alhaji Umaru we are of the opinion that the real meaning of his works may be uncovered on the basis of a broader analysis of his whole opus which is yet to be done.

J.K.Shcheglov (1976:77–82), having discussed various Hausa chronicles, pointed to their laconic, formulaic style, visible schematism, and to their relative chronology. Every such historical source is supposed to contain the number of succession of a ruler and his name, the names of his father and mother, main data on his rule, description of his character and of his attitudes towards different social strata, innovations introduced by him, his nicknames and praise–epithets, enumeration of the most important dignitaries, information on newly erected buildings and other constructions of public utility, and so on.

The lack of any dates is also typical of Alhaji Umaru's historical writings. He provides the information which is claimed to be typical of court chronicles, but not all of them in a single manuscript, and not in a schematic style. On the contrary, some episodes are presented in a literary style, and in a metaphorical way. Let us take an example from the manuscript on Masina. When Al–Ḥājj ʿUmar Tall conquered Segu (1861), its ruler, Ila Watara, fled to Masina. Al–Ḥājj ʿUmar called for his extradiction in an exchange of letters:

> "Then he sent a message to Ahmadu ɗan Ahmadu, the King of Masina. He commanded to tell him that he, Alhaji Umaru, drove away a gazelle, and it fell into his (Ahmadu's) herd. He should capture it, and give it back to him. The King of Masina said: 'As for me, whatever fell into it,my herd will be saved'. Alhaji sent a messenger once more, and said: 'Tell the King of Masina that it is a gazelle, not a goat'. As for him (Ahmadu), he replied: 'Gazelle and goat, it is all the same. If they escape, they will come back to him'. Alhaji Umaru sent still another messenger and said: 'Tell him to slaughter that gazelle. He may take half of its meat, and another half let him

send to me'. The King of Masina said: 'As for me, I will not slaughter anything which ran away and came to me in order to save its life'. Alhaji Umaru sent a messenger saying that the King of Masina might slaughter that gazelle and send him back (its) head and skin. As for him,he could keep the whole meat." (Masina Ms, f° 1 v., p. 2).

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Alhaji Umaru was an independent writer, acting far away from his fatherland, on the territories of present–day Ghana and Togo. He had an enormous knowledge resulting from a dozen of years of study, from his travels all over West Africa, a large net of contacts with the centres of Islamic learning and famous learned men, and – last but not least – from a years–long co–operation with European travellers, scientists and colonial officers. He was in a position to describe the reality as he himself saw and understood it, without any censorship. He was not obliged to follow historical court traditions, with their limitations and schematism. Therefore his writings, after having been duly edited and commented upon, will significantly revolutionize the history of a considerable part of West Africa and provide the reader with a fascinating piece of historical prose.

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The Transportability of Culturally Specific Elements in Okot p'Bitek's "Song of Lawino"

Shaban Mayanja

Of late, some books, research papers and even dissertations have been written on the cumbersome subject of the problems encountered when attempting to portray African reality in foreign, i.e. in non-African languages. Due to its interdisciplinary nature, research in this field has proved to be of vital importance in literature and in many related disciplines like ethnology, socio-linguistics, religious studies, translation studies and international relations; in brief, in intercultural studies.

Research has centred mostly on the analysis of the difficulties involved at both conceptual and linguistic levels. The Senegalese scholar Khadi Fall examined for instance the complex nature of a literary communication between black Africa and Germany by highlighting the errors made by the German translator of Sembene Ousmane's novel "God's bits of wood".

Still in Germany, Paul Goetsch from Tübingen and others have done pioneer work through their regular publication "Script-Oralia" (Dialects and foreign languages in literature 1987) which focuses on the so-called oral literatures and on their transportability into non-oral societies.

Closely related to this, is the unsolved or perhaps unsolvable question of the very essence and nature of African literature. This seemingly trivial debate has a serious impact on my topic: until there is some kind of understanding of the nature of African Literatures in the first place, the whole discussion on the problems encountered when reproducing the same sounds absurd.

This dimension is important for unless we are clear on *what actually is to be reproduced*, shall we be able to understand the complexity of this process, and, hopefully examine the possibilities of a transportation despite the problems involved.

Perhaps the most intriguing contribution in this regard was made by Gareth Griffiths, Helen Tiffin and Bill Ashcroft in "The Empire Writes Back To The Centre" (= EWB, 1989), in which among other things, they seriously challenge the authenticity of African literatures, and, by implication the very existence of an African experience or reality for that matter. They instead favour the concept of hybridity, arising out of the confrontation between African and European cultures before, during and after colonialism. This hybridity manifests itself in "new realities" and in the so called *Post-colonial literatures.*

The notion of Post-colonial literatures revolves around two key concepts namely, abrogation and appropriation. Abrogation refers to the rejection of the West's sole claim over the supremacy in determining what is "real" and "unreal". Appropriation on the other hand, means that the colonial language is consequently adjusted in accordance with indigenous concepts and values and then restructured in such a way as to reflect and express cultural difference.

This theory has been seriously challenged since. Ghosh-Schellhorn (Post-colonial Literature? 1993) for instance, reiterates that writing in a foreign language significantly affects the author's intention since the original language also gets transformed by its novel context of usage.

The dissatisfaction following the introduction of the term "Post-colonialism" has not hindered it from becoming one of the most essential key terms in contemporary critical discourse. Nonetheless, in their recent review of EWB, Vijay Mishra and Bob Hodge attribute the weakness of the term to the "Settler provenance of the book's three authors" (Abiola, 1994). Though biased and unrealistic, this genetically based criticism serves to highlight the danger of generalizing experiences in colonial settler societies (presently belonging to the "First World") and transferring them to non-settler "Third World" societies.

One of the leading proponents of the theory of hybridity, or if I may borrow her term, "the indigenization theory" is Chantal Zabus. According to her, the indigenization theory, considering the role of pidgin (enPi) in Nigeria as an example, shoulders the heavy but necessary burden of transforming African reality from one of filiation to one of affiliation, since pidgin, she argues, is not ethnic-bound, has many speakers and has been widely accepted as an "indigenous" or indigenized language of African expression.

Chantal Zabus thus describes African literary texts as palimpsests:

> *"They are indeed palimpsests in that behind the scriptual authority of the European language, the earlier, imperfectly erased remnants of the African language can still be perceived when decyphering the palimpsest, what is recorded is the trace in filigree of such African source language".*(Zabus, 1991:4)

It follows then that the interaction between African and European languages in situation of digglosia (Ferguson, Word 1959:325-340) is the sole motor of the indigenization of African texts transmitting an already indigenized *(not africanized)* experience. Chantal Zabus' ideal case is pidgin (enPi) and the role she attaches to it, which, in my opinion is subject to debate. Pidgin, she asserts, is an ideal example of indigenization for:

> *"Indigenization refers to the writer's attempt at textualizing linguistic differentiation and conveying African concepts, thought patterns, and linguistic features through the excolonizer's language"* (The African Palimpsest, 1991:2).

The extent to which this can be achieved when portraying African reality in a European language, will be the focal point of my presentation. Martina Michel wonders in her essay "Post-colonial Literatures" (1993:6) whether there are any significant arguments supporting all these termini; third world literature, commonwealth literature, francophone African literature etc or whether "Post-colonial" has been adopted for being fashionable like Post modern. In the final analysis, Post-colonial Literature, like its predecessors, has tended to succumb to globalisation. All this serves to indicate the necessity to scrutinise more critically the complex nature of African reality before attempting to discuss its transportability into a non-African language.

Whereas it is an undisputed fact that, with the advent of early Arab traders and colonialism, African societies, like any other oppressed societies have had to undergo various social, cultural, economic and political experiments, one can nevertheless assert with confidence that despite or perhaps even due to these changes, these societies have retained a uniqueness of some sort consisting of what I describe as *culturally specific elements or phenomena.*

On the other hand, leading African writers like Ngugi wa Thiong'o (Decolonising the Mind, 1988) have tended to underestimate the increasing role played by European languages in social and political life of contemporary Africa. Considering the heavy price African languages have had to pay due to this, Ngugi's pledge appears to be justified especially when he tries to explain what African literature in essence is, and ought to be (Moving the Centre, 1993).

In Ngugi's opinion African reality can only be portrayed true to the matter in indigenous African languages. His bidding farewell to English can thus not only be read as an expression of resistance against what he calls imperial domination, but also in terms of emphasizing the credibility of African reality presented in indigenous African languages. Though translation may serve to bridge the gap between cultures, Ngugi is aware of the limitations involved and thus seems to attach secondary importance to the transportation of African reality into European languages.

> *"When I translated 'Devil on the cross', in the first half I was working as if I was writing a novel in English. That is, I tried to see if I was rendering the feel of their <the characters'> speech into English and so on.<...> If I was doing the translation of novel again I'd probably make a much better job than I did. I know some of my Gikuyu readers who had read the Gikuyu original and now have read the English translation have complained deeply about the loss of certain things in the English translation".* (Ngugi, 1994:30)

I agree with Oyekan Owomoyela (1993) when he declares that literature and language are inseparable, since as he says Russian literature in Russian would be a tautology. Thus, literary works lose important qualities the moment they cross linguistic borders. In his book "African

Religions in Western Scholarship" (1976), Okot p'Bitek sums up his message in "Song of Lawino" when he asserts:

> *"The African scholar has two major tasks before him, first to expose and destroy all false ideas about African peoples and cultures perpetuated by western scholarship <...> second, the African scholar must endeavour to present the institutions of African peoples as they really are. Western scholars had to justify the colonial system, hence the need for the myth of the primitive."* (Okot, 1976:14)

"Song of Lawino" was written originally in Acoli, a language spoken in northern Uganda under the title "Wer pa Lawino". During the Gulu Arts Festivals, Okot translated a few chapters of "Wer pa Lawino" into English. The enthusiasm with which they were received after having been rejected by several publishers before forced Okot to embark on the difficult task of translating the entire "song" into English.

"Song of Lawino" (= SOL, 1989) is a social document with a political motive. It is the lamentation of an Acoli woman Lawino, proud of her culture over the increasing threat posed by the new European values. It is a biting attack of the western way of life and many may thus be led into believing that the book merely glorifies African traditions, something that could not be much further from the truth. This is a misconception for Lawino, according to Okot (SOL 1989)

> *"is the writer's tool for making his own comments on the way people behave in East Africa".*

Lawino, the central figure embodies African traditions whereas her western educated husband Ocol is a caricature of a parrot-like cultural convert to the European lifestyle. Ocol's decision to elope with the "Clementina" is a clear testimony to this. The overriding theme is hence a cultural conflict.

It is important to point out, that since the perspective of a "traditional" woman like Lawino would be limited to her immediate environment, Okot p'Bitek thus decided to write "Song of Ocol" which is not only a reply to Lawino's accusations, but serves as an attempt to demonstrate some negative aspects of the Acoli way of life, and, by implication of African cultures, where culture according to Okot, refers to a philosophy of the way of life, the way it is lived and celebrated (Okot 1986:13).

Thus, contrary to popular belief, "Song of Lawino" does not advocate for a "Back to the Roots" policy, but rather cautions African societies against a wholesale consumption of foreign values and calls for a critical self appraisal as well.

"Song of Lawino" was written in verse. In the process, Okot attempted to render Acoli oral traditions into English. At the same time, he integrated some elements from European poetry forms into Acoli, for instance the rhyme scheme. The result was a unique poetry form that can

be best described as free verse and which, at first sight can be taken for a successful indigenization.

Okot admits to serious problems whilst translating "Wer pa Lawino" into English. He therefore cautions African writers who do so in foreign (non-African) languages when he says:

> *"There is a grave danger that with the tool of language they will borrow other foreign things <...> How many of these tools can a writer borrow before his African ideas are affected by the influence of foreign ideas implied in them ?"* (1982:2)

In analysing the transportability of culturally specific elements in SOL, I will focus on the transfer of Acoli oral traditions, selected metaphors and images into English, and, where possible on the manner of their rendering into the German language.

Acoli oral traditions

What strikes one immediately on reading SOL is the direct form of address employed by Lawino e.g. "Husband", "My clansmen" etc. This Acoli rhetoric form is meant to emphasize particular aspects. In the English version, i.e. SOL the same effect is supposedly achieved through the repetition of some words at the end of a verse. This is illustrated for instance in chapter three of "Wer pa Lawino":

> *"Timme utimme Munu-Munu*
> *Ping'o lewic pe mako munu*
> *Lukwako dako atyer, calo Munu*
> *Luting'o pong'kor, calo Munu*
> *Wa mon, wa co calo Munu".*

In SOL the effect (Eugene Nida, 1964) of this repetition and the resulting rhythm were significantly reduced:

> *"You kiss her on the cheek*
> *As white people do,*
> *You kiss her open-sore lips*
> *As white people do*
> *You suck the slimy saliva*
> *From each others mouths*
> *As white people do"* (SOL:44)

The German version is not any better:

> *"Du küsst die Person auf die Wange,*
> *gerade wie die Weißen,*
> *Ihr saugt euch gegenseitig*

den schleimigen Speichel aus den Mündern
gerade wie die Weißen" (Lawinos Lied:28)

The last two verses in the Acoli original are merely attached to the next line and in the process, the repetition of "Calo Munu" (like the white people do) is not considered, yet it is precisely through this repetition that Lawino seeks to warn against continued wanton imitation of the European lifestyle.

SOL was not only meant for self criticism on the side of the African Elite, but also as a form of culture as lived. It was meant for singing and dancing as well. This dimension is undoubtedly one of the most difficult to transport. Having translated "Wer pa Lawino" himself (auto-translation), Okot was very much aware of this and that is why to a certain extent, the Acoli rhythm characteristic of the *bwola* and *dingi dingi* dances is still traceable in the English version. For example the way in which the various verses are connected reflects the mood and emotions of Lawino, something which was neglected in the German translation.

In addition, the conscious division of SOL into smaller "sub texts" was ignored in the German version. Consequently the meaning was altered and the rhythm was significantly weakened. As an example, the German translator compressed three "sub texts" into one in the very first chapter of SOL. The result was a long text which does not take the important transition from one sub-text to another into account besides altering the style significantly.

The most striking difference between the two texts is that the first line "I was made chief of girls" was put in second position. Yet this is the most important statement here, since Okot's primary motivation for writing was his mother Lacwaa the "mentor" of the character Lawino.

Acoli images

In SOL it is fairly easy for a native speaker and for someone conversant with the Acoli way of life to trace the Acoli origin in Lawino's choice of language and images. I will now attempt to compare a traditional Acoli song with a text in SOL and discuss some of the problematic issues involved.

Text in SOL:

"Beg forgiveness from them
And ask them to give you
A new spear
A new spear with a sharp and
hard point
A spear that will crack the
rock
Ask for a spear that you will
trust" (Okot, 1989:119)

Acoli song:

"The spear with the hard point
slits the granite rock
The spear that I trust
Penetrates the granite rock
The hunter has slept in the
wilderness
I die Oh" (Okot, 1974:15)

The example above shows how Okot attempted to integrate traditional Acoli images into his "song". In SOL however, the symbolic meaning of the spear cannot be easily deciphered. The possession of a spear in many African societies is a symbol of courage and manhood. It is the latter that is more significant in this case, for Ocol has to regain his manhood in order to function and to be reaccepted by his society. The sexual connotation of the spear is thus the most decisive element, not merely courage and physical strength.

This raises two important problems: Firstly, it is extremely difficult for someone from a different cultural background to understand the real meaning of these pictures, though fairly similar ones might exist in his/her society. Secondly, and more importantly, it is no easy task to adequately transfer such images into a foreign language, and, by implication foreign culture without doing what Lefevere calls the "manipulation" of literature (1992).

I stress real meaning here, for there is, in my opinion a difference between a formal, orthodox meaning and a real meaning or sense of a culturally specific element. In his analysis of the German translation of *kikerewe* proverbs in Aniceti Kitereza's "Bwana Myombekere na Bibi Bugonoka na Ntulanalwo na Bulihwali", Wilhelm Möhlig makes an interesting distinction between the two levels of meaning: *Sinn und Bedeutung.*

The complexity of imagology is further demonstrated by the manner in which the "Rain Cock" was translated.

"The electric fire kills people
They say
It is lightning
They say
The whiteman has trapped
And caught the Rain Cock
And imprisoned it
In a heavy steel house". (Okot, 1989:57)

This was translated as follows into German:

"*Das elektrische Feuer kann tödlich sein*
Man sagt,
es sei ein Blitz,
Man sagt,

die Weissen haben
den Regenhahn eingefangen
und in ein starkes
Haus aus Stahl gesperrt". (Okot, 1982: 57)

The implied meaning of the word "Rain Cock" was never adequately explained. In SOL a brief explanation is given on the same page:

> *"It is believed that lightning and thunder are caused by a giant reddish-brown bird that is almost identical with the domestic fowl. When it opens its wings lightning flashes and thunder is caused when it strikes with its powerful bolt". (Okot, 1989:57)*

In the German translation the explanation is found in the glossary and is significantly shortened:

> *"Ein grosser, roter, mythologischer Vogel, der einem gewöhnlichen Hahn ähnelt und den Blitz in den Krallen trägt". (Okot, 1982:203)*

Here, a myth in form of an overdimensional bird that brings rain to a dry region is incorporated into SOL. Although Okot's explanation does not explicitly mention the important function of the Rain Cock as a "rain bringer", it nevertheless shows the mythical significance of the same through the detailed description, something that cannot be said of the German version.

Clearly Okot attempted to retain as much of the Acoli oral traditions in the English version as possible. This noble wish seems to have tempted him to at times practise literal translation. Among the culturally specific elements involved, Acoli proverbs appear to have suffered most from this approach.

Thus, Taban Loliyong once remarked: *"The meanings of deep Acoli proverbs are made very light by their rendition into English word for word, rather than sense for sense or proverb for proverb" (1969:141).*

Okot's translation has been subject to criticism from Acoli scholars. According to Okumu pa Lukobo, the rivalry between Lawino and Clementina is so much emphasized that it overshadows the actual theme i.e. the cultural conflict (Okot, 1989:12). He therefore considers the recurring refrain "the pumpkin in the old homestead must not be uprooted" unsuitable. He suggests instead "*Dako abila ni eye meni*" (Your mother is your first wife).

In my opinion, Okumu's criticism is based on a misunderstanding; Okot does not only portray a rivalry between two women but rather uses this as a microcosm for the larger disease affecting African societies. To this extent the usage of the refrain which incidentally originates from an important Acoli proverb is justified. Nevertheless, its transportation into English leaves a lot to be desired.

In her epilogue to the German version "Lawinos Lied", Inge Uffelmann suggests that the special difficulties involved in translating proverbs may have forced Okot to abandon the latter and more detailed part of the refrain. "Do not uproot the pumpkin" is part of the full Acoli proverb and its connotations are difficult to grasp without being acquainted with the proverb and history of the Acoli. Having been a semi nomadic people, the Acolis used to plant pumpkins when leaving their old homesteads in search of pasture. This was meant to help those that would come after them and wayfarers. Hence uprooting a pumpkin in a semi arid, semi nomadic country meant sure death.

The problems of the transportability of culturally specific elements discussed raise two important questions: Can and should African reality be transported into a European language ? Secondly, is "afrophone" African literature more difficult to transport than "francophone" or "anglophone" African literature for that matter?

The deliberations above should not be interpreted as a resignation over the impossibility of transporting culturally specific phenomena. Rather they should serve to create a more critical awareness in translation practice, criticism and literary discourse for in the final analysis the transfer of culturally specific phenomena, though extremely difficult, is both possible and necessary.

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Undulating Perceptions: The interplay of Hope and Despair in Contemporary Nigerian Poetry[1]

Ezenwa-Ohaeto

The interplay of hope and despair has always been associated with human affairs and the two themes have also been prominent in Literature. A scrutiny of the western tradition in poetry or the literatures from other parts of the world and particularly Africa, will reveal the basis for linking hope and despair. It is hope which makes it possible for human beings to overcome despair and it is the need for the elimination of despair that informs the thematic preoccupation with hope in modern African poetry. Thus the Nigerian poet who is convinced that despair needs to be challenged with hope creates poems that stress the need for reality to be understood clearly so that one can cleverly and realistically plan for the future. In effect the fact that the poet makes an interplay between hope and despair implies an imaginative perception of real life that is fashioned to be culturally, politically and socially insightful.

Such creative objectives are necessary and they reflect what the Ghanaian poet Atukwei Okai once indicated when he commented that "Africa today more than ever before, is at the cross-roads of self determination, self-search, self assertion and self analysis, and her people are in real need of all imaginable kinds of spiritual signposts, moral lighthouses, philosophical watering holes, developmental traffic lights and psychic computer banks" (Okai: 1282).There is no doubt that poetry effectively tackles those spiritual, moral, philosophical and development issues for the late eminent critic, Donatus Nwoga, in one of his timeless essays insists that "poetry has always been a major component of African imaginative activity" and that "the range of poetry extends from the single phrase filled out with grunts and developed through repetitions, composed and performed to ritual; through the most sophisticated phrasing of language to the development and exploration of images relevant to a theme." Nwoga adds that the occasion of poetry is quite extensive covering the various shared aspects of life associated with "sickness, marriage, love, death; to ritual incantations made to bring about changes in life or changes in relationship between the living and the dead or between man and the supernatural" (Nwoga:32). In effect Nwoga's view confirms that the desire to communicate, the use of language and the relevance of using hope to counter despair are

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important factors that the poet takes into consideration, for they are the factors that refine poetry as well as give it appropriate poetic tension. Nevertheless the vision of the poet is essential because in as much as the other factors are equally essential without a relevant perception of reality the poet lacks understanding and cannot produce poems that incorporate the appropriate ideas for the future.

It is this ability to perceive reality relevantly in poetry that makes the poet exercise ingenuity in the provision of answers to the complex questions of human interactions in the society. The exacting requirement involved in this task is what the perceptive critic Emmanuel Obiechina rightly describes thus:

> The vision imprisoned in solid matter may appear adequate at the beginning when the stakes are relatively low, but with the escalation of the crisis to the threat of total collapse of the state and the dream behind it, new issues come to view, and new questions necessarily arise that radicalise our expectations of the poet of public commitment. We ask: does this spokesman know enough? Is his experience adequate to qualify him as spokesman? Has he felt the terror of the intangible, of the inchoate and fluid state of being from which the process of creation began? Can he speak authoritatively of those deep mysteries that surround humanity, especially in those harsh moments when we are helplessly pushed back toward the sources? Can the poet bear the terror of dissolution and death, or will he lose heart at the first sight of the massive, heaving movement toward the chaos of the beginning? Can he endure the painful immensity of isolation and abandonment and the final dissolution of his own individual being? In other words we ask if the poet is equipped to deal with integrity, candour, and sensitivity - not as an abstract reality, but as a fate that constitutes part of the common heritage of a people being systematically pushed back into cave of disaster, into the womb of chaos (Obiechina: 226)

These are indeed fundamental questions that interrogate the essence of creativity and the motive of the poet. However Nigerian poets have never been daunted by such tasking questions. Obiechina feels that Christopher Okigbo passes these exacting tests through his poetic sensibilities, refined and sharpened by the crisis of his times. In the same way several other Nigerian poets pass these same exacting tests for their works portray a sensitive and visionary construction of alternative realities.

We begin our analysis with Okigbo who is an enduring phenomenon in African and particularly Nigerian poetry. The vision of Okigbo gives credence to the view that a poet could serve as spokesman, that the poet is equipped to deal with integrity, candour, and sensitivity the heritage of his people, their aspirations and socio-political objectives. It is

Okigbo who captures the uncomfortable image of the social disintegration of the last sixties in Nigeria when he laments in his "Path of Thunder", that

> The smell of blood already floats in the lavendermist of the afternoon,
> The death sentence lies in ambush along the corridors of power;
> And a great fearful thing already tugs at the cables of the open air (Okigbo: 66)

That "fearful thing" tugging at the "cables of the open air" and the smell of blood floating in the afternoon as well as the death sentence "along the corridors of power" result in the frightening reality that Okigbo describes thus:

> the cabinet has gone to hell
> the timbers are now on fire
> the cabinet that sold itself
> ministers are now in goal (68)

The implication of a cabinet of ministers "going to hell" and the image of the men of timber that are "now on fire" indicate that the society is on the verge of disintegration. However the vision of the poet inspite of these disconcerting images, is not one of despair for Okigbo concludes this poem which prophesied the Nigerian Civil War with an interesting and symbolic interplay of hope and despair. The poet mentions "the glimpse of a dream" which "lies smouldering in a cave" before he concludes with the memorable stanza:

> An old star departs, leaves us here on the shore
> Gazing heavenwards for a new star approaching;
> The new star appears, foreshadows its going
> Before a going and coming that goes forever (72).

The going of the new star and its coming epitomize this intrinsic interplay of hope and despair in Nigerian poetry. Okigbo clearly implies that it is a "going and coming that goes forever". E. N. Obiechina comments that this stanza in Okigbo's poetry "is a masterly stroke of prophetic insight, he foretells not only his own going but the course of events that were to come and to affect the world whose humanistic values he has so vitally and single-mindedly and beautifully illuminated, and within which he has painstakingly sowed the seed of imperishable love and harmony against the wild, subversive passions of materialistically bound obsessions", (Obiechina: 237). What Obiechina describes as the seed of imperishable love and harmony knocking against the wild subversive passions of materialistically bound obsessions is another way of illustrating the basic interplay of hope (love and harmony) and despair (wild and subversive passions). In effect the vision of Okigbo extends beyond the immediate incidents in order to portray the possibility of positive developments embedded in

the future. It is this kind of vision that enables contemporary Nigerian poets argue persuasively that the people must not despair.

This insistence on the elimination of despair is what has characterized even the works of those poets who have examined the war as we find in the poetry of Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka, John Pepper Clark-Bekederemo, Pol Ndu, Michael Echeruo, Kalu Uka and Gabriel Okara. In the same way the poets have examined the post-war reality of Nigeria with the result that their work indicate sad but critical concern which is not strange for Isidore Okpewho feels that "on the whole the poets (from Africa) are sad about the state of affairs not only in their countries and in Africa but in the world generally, and this sadness causes them to be critical", (Okpewho: 20). However, in the expression of that sadness the poets Gabriel Okara, Odia Ofeimun, Tanure Ojaide, Obiora Udechukwu, Frank Aig-Imoukhuede, Niyi Osundare, Molara Ogundipe-Leslie and Ifi Amadiume strive to illustrate the fact that hope is ever present in the midst of despair.

Gabriel Okara, for instance criticises hypocrisy in human affairs when he recalls metaphorically, the insincerity in life in the poem "Once upon a time". He writes thus:

> Once upon a time, son
> they used to laugh with their hearts
> and laugh with their eyes;
> but now they only laugh with their teeth
> while their ice-block-cold eyes
> search behind my shadow

The consequence of this insincerity portrayed by the false smiles is that the persona in the poem learns to "wear many faces like dresses" with the result that he acquires:

> home face
> office face, street face, host face,
> cocktail face, with all conforming smiles
> like a fixed portrait smile.

But the criticism does not rest on a note of despair or the tabulation of insincere expressions and hypocritical attitudes for the poet concludes with the request:

> so show me, son
> how to laugh, show me how
> I used to laugh and smile
> once upon a time when I was like you. (Okara:18-19)

This request is both an admiration and an arousal of hope for in recalling the childhood state of sincerity, honesty and truthfulness, the poet hints at those qualities that will help the society to develop and progress. What Okara's vision reflects in that poem is related to the

interplay of hope and despair in Odia Ofeimun's lyrical poem entitled "Come to our Rally". In this poem Ofeimun uses an idea derived from his oral tradition which hinges on communal participation to issue invitations that are symbolic. He writes :

Come to our rally
I said to the rain
in every sun
that found a blade of grass
renew the sap
from root to budding wish
...
Come to our rally
I said to the rockhills
in every seed that dared
to rise
to the sower's itch
join the sparrows
wheeling out of nests... (Ofeimun: 138).

The rally which the persona envisages is a rally of unity and a rally in which the participants will find "the sap" and thereby germinate (rise) like seeds "that dared to rise/ to the sower's itch". Thus the invitation of the persona to the "rain" and "rockhills" to "come to (the) rally", is an invitation of hope that will enable the blade of grass overcome despair and "renew the sap" from "root to budding wish" just as the "seed" will dare to rise "to the sower's itch". The hope in Ofeimun's poetry is also the hope that justice will prevail through the establishment of equal opportunities for human development.

In the same way Tanure Ojaide advocates the importance of justice in human affairs. Ojaide's hope exhibited in his poetry is the hope that it is possible to create a just and equitable society; but where this effort fails the poet hints at a possible retribution. In the poem "Now that I am forty", Ojaide makes this impression clear:

Now that I am forty
I will not abandon my road
I wield the matchet
against adversaries
with it I fan myself
when secure in dreams (Ojaide: 93)

The poet in that extract uses the matchet as a symbol for effecting justice in the society "against adversaries" and also as a symbol for a sense of security for it could be used to "fan" himself when "secure in dreams". This projection of both negative (despair) and positive (hope) capabilities is a vision of caution for Ojaide is clearly stressing the fact that care should be exercised in order not to turn hope into despair through a symbolic use of that matchet as possessing negative and positive qualities. This caution becomes pronounced in the poetry of

Frank Aig-Imoukhuede who is not restricted by language in his configuration of alternative realities.

Aig-Imoukhuede uses pidgin as we find in the poetry of Mamman Vatsa and Ezenwa-Ohaeto. In the first two poems in his collection of poems Aig-Imoukhuede presents the irony, the wit and the humour as well as the vision discernible in pidgin poetry. In the poem "Flood don come", the poet uses the flood as a metaphor for the exploitation of people in the society which has been disorganized. He ends the poem with the haunting words:

> We 'tanda dey look
> As country scatter for we head;
> By force no 'be likeness:
> Rape na Rape
> Whether na gun or strong prick (Aig-Imoukhuede:1)
> [We stand and look
> As the country disintegrates on our head;
> Use of force does not show love:
> Rape is rape
> Whether through a gun or a strong penis].

The metaphorization of the issue of rape in this poem is not an attempt to appear flippant or escapist because the poet is aware of the effective use of pidgin to portray emotions, views and ideas insightfully. In addition the need to exercise caution which the poet indicates is part of the need to act in ways that make the ordinary people feel that there is hope that the society will overcome its political and economic tribulations that generate despair.

The poet perceives pidgin as an effective language for examining the society. In the poem entitled "Pidgin Stew", Aig-Imoukhuede reflects this awareness when he states that "na like-jest like jest/Dem dey rub blockuss/for public place" [It is through acting as if in jest / A person's genitalia is exposed in public]; the idea is that pidgin could be used as a language which humorously illustrates the truth. Thus the poet codifies this concept of pidgin as a language which could be employed to arouse hope and overcome despair through humour when he writes:

> But I tell you big morsel
> Dey hard stronghead swallow
> Unless you get good stew
> Tickle am for him belleh.
> So cook stew of pidgin
> Give tyranny chop
> He go chop so -tay, lick
> Finger dey laugh as
> Dem rub him blockuss
> For public place.(Aig-Imoukhuede: 2-3)
> [But I tell you that a big quantity of food

Is difficult for a stubborn man to swallow
Unless you possess an appetizing stew
And tickle his appetite.
So prepare pidgin stew
And offer it to tyranny to eat
He will eat and lick
His fingers in happiness
While his genitalia are exposed
In the public place.]

Pidgin poetry as the poet states here portrays the vision and the configurations of an alternative way of presenting reality. The pidgin poet deploys language based on the canvas of the undulating Nigerian socio-political scene as a means to an end; which is the use of humour wit, irony, sarcasm and ridicule to erase despair and make the reader hopeful that the future will be positive. Pidgin language is thus not a cul-de-sac in poetry but a viable medium for the vision necessary for reordering priorities; establishing moral values and refining sensibilities. It is this abiding concern that Obiora Udechukwu portrays when he makes an interplay of hope and despair through his use of language as he stresses those same moral values and the importance of refining human sensibilities.

Udechukwu employs his oral tradition through its proverbialism, aphoristic phrases and refrains to emphasize the features of social inequalities in the society that generate the feeling of despair. The poet perceives those social and economic inequalities as manifestations of the deviance exhibited by those in leadership positions. In the poem the persona says:

If rain catches you in Ikate
If rain catches you in Aguda
I say
If rain catches you in Lagos
Roll up your trousers
Get ready to swim,
We were once poor but wealthy
We are now rich but poor,
If thirst catches you in Uwani
If thirst catches you in Ogui,
I say
If thirst catches you in Enugu
There are many gutters for free
Police will not arrest you,
We were once poor but rich
We are now rich but poor (Udechukwu: 53)

The ironic advice by the persona that if "rain catches you in Lagos" you should "roll up your trousers" for a swim as well as the advice that "if thirst catches you in Enugu you should drink from the gutters" illustrate the feeling of despair in the society. The paradox of being

"once poor but rich" and "now rich but poor" equally illustrates the abnormal dispensation of a people with abundant natural resources who still remain economically indigent. However, Udechukwu does not despair for his vision is that the society can regenerate itself which is why he concludes the poem thus:

> Let the rain rush down
> Let the children have a free shower
> Even if some drown
> Let the rainbow give the land a new dress
> Let there be rain
> Let there be rain (65).

It is obvious that the rain the poet desires is a rain of life and hope; a rain that will wash away the insensitive policies, the social inequalities, the hypocrisy and the deceit. Although the poet perceives a form of sacrifice in that rain for he insists that "even if some drown", there is still the hope that "the rainbow will give the land a new dress".

It is this same hope that we find in Osundare's poetry inspite of his mordant criticism. This hope is discernible in the title of Osundare's poetry collection which he calls Waiting laughters. Thus hope is a significant trope in the poems as the poet stresses that laughter is waiting to emerge. Part of this interesting collection of poems reads:

> But the sun strides through the clouds
> to the threshold of noon,
> strong untrappably wiser;
> a quiet smile informs the sky's diurnal face
> and the clouds sullen brow
> is promise of a gentle shower
> Joy-killers will find ready grave
> in the labyrinth of their venom
> laugher will surely come back
> to the paradise of our lips (Osundare: 86-87)

The vision of the poet that hope resides in "the promise of a gentle shower" confirms Udechukwu's view and the belief that "laughter will come to the paradise of our lips". Such assertions make the balance between hope and despair in contemporary Nigerian poetry tilt in favour of hope.

Nevertheless the works of the recent but not necessarily younger poets seem to challenge this issue of hope with the result that much more recent Nigerian poetry appears to depict a desperate running battle between hope and despair. Ifi Amadiume in her poem "Love and Peace" makes this battle between hope and despair significant when she writes:

> In this war-torn world men
> we will write love letters

with flowers,
send them across the frontline,
till forbidden maidens across the frontiers
defy the shattering sounds of grenades,
bullets,
bombs
and rockets; (Amadiume: 37)

Amadiume's belief that it is necessary to write "love letters" in this "war-torn world of men" is an indication of the hope which her poem projects. However it is significant that the "love letters" are not for the soldiers but for the "forbidden maidens across the frontiers". Thus this poem is projecting a vision of hope through those maidens who will march to the battle front armed with "yellow palmfronds/white carnation" and "red roses" which are symbols of peace, in order to atone for the "precious blood /spilled in men's excesses". This thematic preoccupation with hope becomes much more emphatic at the end of the poem when the poet writes:

Everywhere,
children
lovers,
women
will sing the love of peace
let war-mongers beware,
women are here for peace (38)

Amadiume in this last stanza yokes together issues of gender and hope through the insistence that the women will "sing of peace", thereby making obvious that the women are against all wars that generate the feeling of despair. It is also this feeling of despair that Molara Ogundipe-Leslie seeks to eliminate when she writes in the poem "I Seek Life" thus:

I crave life
not in the celebrations of conceit,
dry winds to soothe the battered self;
I seek life, in silence and acts,
self-prepared to birth our conceived selves,
(Sallah, ed. New Poets of West Africa: 52)

The life which Ogundipe-Leslie craves for is the type of life that will "birth our conceived selves". In effect the hope in this poem is the hope, that characteristics that portray conceit, dishonesty and selfishness will not be part of daily human interactions and activities as well as in "the birth of conceived selves".

Nevertheless, in some other poems by other Nigerian poets the feeling of despair may appear uncomfortable and disconcerting. Chimalum Nwankwo in the poem "Bush Dirge"

insists that "thunder blows for the living and the dead" (Sallah ed.: 46), and in the poem "To a lost Fire bearer" he writes:

> I can tell
> there is no boundary
> between
> My bad dreams
> And my waking moment (Sallah ed.:47-8).

The impression which this extract gives is that reality and nightmares seem to possess undecipherable boundaries. However in concluding the poem Nwankwo gives a feeling of hope when he insists that "this is not the season/ of head hunters" and that "when I need sleep / I can tell". Thus, inspite of the uncertainty of reality the poet is still convinced that this is not a season of head-hunters or those who encourage feelings of despair and prevent people sleeping comfortably. In the same way the interplay of hope and despair in Silas Obadiah's poem "Beggars" gives the impression that the feeling of despair is almost unbearable. He catalogues the various incidents that make the life of the beggars full of despair. For instance he feels that "the wind rapes their shaky sleep"" thereby stretching "their winding nights to millenniums"" while the "rains plunder their shacks" and "send them groping into doom". These incidents that appear to emanate from the natural phenomena of wind and rain are symbolic of the acts of the privileged who do not care for the lot of the beggars in real life[2]. But Obadiah is convinced that these acts of harrassment that cause despair could still be challenged for he writes:

> God hears their pleading cries
> And sends manna from the sky
> And the poet hears their woes
> And is branded a spinner of worthless
> yarns (Sallah, ed: 93)

Obadiah hinges the hope here on divine intervention although he still indicates that the poet will always give voice to the "woes" of those beggars. But the divine intervention which he advocates will materialize through human beings acting through the "direction of God" just like the poet who "howls their woes".

Two other younger poets Elias Dunu and Paul Onovoh do not appear to depend on mere divine intervention as the solution to the problems of socio-political despair. These poets portray the attitude that the erasure of feelings of despair must emanate from the people themselves. In a poem entitled "But we must stand tall" Dunu argues persuasively that anger should not be the end-result but a means to an end. The poem commences thus:

[2] An incident in 1988 confirms this view; the Nigerian Military Government sent bulldozers to demolish the shacks of both beggars and the less privileged in a section of Lagos known as Maroko.

We've been sitting idle for long
Clutching a stale anger at our chest
Our wish to strangle death to death.

The issue that Dunu emphasizes here is that despair should not be allowed to become a permanent feature inspite of the nature of the event that originated it. In effect the feeling that the poet arouses here is related to the fact that it is possible to transform even a tragedy like death into a positive issue. Thus the poem ends:

Time has passed by since the comet
Ran the length of the immense sky
Still we seek to bring the nights trial to berth
Behind these forests of tears
Beyond the blurred horizon
But we must stand tall and stay awake (Dunu: 64)

In that reference to "staying awake" and "standing tall", the poet introduces the themes of self pride and self reliance. In addition the desire "to bring night's trial to berth" and proceed beyond a "blurred horizon" add to this insistence that hope will always counter despair. It is this same poetic idea that we also find in the poetry of Paul Onovoh. In the poem entitled "Cry out", Onovoh puts the matter squarely:

Except the oppressed cries out
How can salvation come to him?
Except the woman in labour shouts
Who will know her pains?
And how can strength come to her (Onovoh: 18)

The images of the oppressed and "the woman in labour" are used to reiterate the idea that the socio-political salvation of the individual lies in "his hands". The idea is that silence is not "always golden" and that the oppressed and the sufferer need to scream in order to attract attention if not help. But it is in another poem entitled "Hear me" that Onovoh clearly states that hope is manifested through self-restraint, hard work and diligent moral efforts. He writes:

Tell my brothers and sisters
That we must survive
Not with gold and silver
But by the works of our hands
A man is known by his actions
So we must survive (Onovoh: 20)

The stress on the idea of survival portrays the hope of the poet-persona but the hope is based on hand work. That is why the poet emphasizes the belief that survival will come through "the works of our hands", and the fact that "a man is known by his actions". The insistence that we must survive therefore codifies the prominence of hope in the poetic vision

of not only Onovoh but also other contemporary Nigerian poets. In a recent collection of poems The Voice Of The Night Masquerade one echoes this idea through the statement that: "The land is wounded/ this land must be mended/ this land is pregnant/ the seeds are in wombs of time/ they have to germinate now" (90).

The interplay of hope and despair in contemporary Nigerian poetry certainly reflects an undulating poetic perception as well as the perennial oscillations between two polar points in human affairs. Each poet considered has however portrayed a balance between the two themes. But as the recent poets in contemporary Nigerian Poetry portray, it appears as if a balance is tilting slightly towards despair. Perhaps this development is not unexpected considering the political and social upheavals in the country. Since literature, no matter how we tend to theorize it, is related to society, contemporary Nigerian poetry as part of that literature is clearly reflecting the tilt of the balance in real life socio-political affairs towards despair. A despair that is spawned by a lack of the will to organize basic human affairs in a manner that should do credit to the "civilization" of the 20th century. The unfortunate consequence, however, is that the younger the poets, the more disillusioned they are likely to appear. Part of this development is that the feeling of despair is gradually metamorphosing into a feeling for the coception of a violent solution to the socio-political problems.

The focus of such feelings is clear for the poets are aware of those people who are responsible for the deficient administrative policies. This awareness accounts for the images of both the politicians and the military that are not flattering in Nigerian poetry. Undoubtedly both the poetic imagination and the perceptions of reality are interwoven for reality impinges on the imagination of the poet and emerges through the poetic perceptions. The poet, therefore, perceives, reflects, reacts and sometimes subverts this reality in order to juxtapose the feelings of despair with the vision of hope. Nevertheless the effect of this poetic perception on art is also an important aspect of the undulating perceptions and reproductions of reality. Definitely there is an effect on art when art or despair or even joy becomes overwhelming. An angry poet may become incoherent just as a very happy poet may be too imaginatively exuberant to the detriment of artistry.

All the same what is discernible is that the works of the poets who are increasingly practised, portray a control of the artistic aspects of creativity. But generally the poetry is not in danger of becoming trite. The Nigerian situation has not made the poets succumb to the seductions of poetic sloganeerings. Rather the poets in their varied but clearly unequal strengths are conscious of the artistic elements necessary to the creation of relevant, interesting poetry. In other words the prominence of despair as a thematic focus has not made contemporary Nigerian poetry degenerate for the juxtaposition of despair and hope stresses the natural balance in life and even in poetic strategies. The poets make an interplay of hope and despair in ways that illustrate rejuvenating creativity and a synthesis of human emotions. The

interesting result is that such perceptions help in the arousal of appropriate feelings in the reader for therapeutic, informative and instructive purposes.

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The Writer as Agitator - Ken Saro-Wiwa

J.A.McIntyre

0.0 Introduction

Ken Saro-Wiwa, writer and agitator, was executed along with eight fellow Ogoni on 10th November 1995. In May 1994 he and his fellow Ogoni - members of the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP) - were accused of inciting the murder of four Ogoni elders, thought to be sympathetic to the military government of Nigeria. Saro-Wiwa wanted to address a MOSOP-campaign meeting but was turned back at a military roadblock. Young MOSOP supporters went on the rampage and killed the four Ogoni elders, who were attending another rally. Ken Saro-Wiwa was not present when the murders took place, he was driving in the other direction; 'incitement' to murder was the best the government could do.

The UN fact-finding mission which investigated the handling of the trial handed in its report to the Nigerian government in May 1996. The mission looked at i) the jurisdiction, constitution and composition of the tribunal, ii) the procedures of the tribunal and iii) the confirmation of the death sentence. Concerning the jurisdiction and constitution of the tribunal the report says that "the special tribunal to try Mr. Ken Saro-Wiwa and others, had *no jurisdiction* to try [them and was] *constituted in violation of...the Act* [1]." (p.21, my italics). The mission was also critical of the composition of the tribunal: "...the presence of a military officer on the tribunal is...contrary to...provisions...found in the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights...and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights" (p.23).

Turning to the actual procedures of the trial, the mission concluded that "...the procedures actually followed in the course of the trial were *not fair*..." (p.21, my italics). Nine points[2],

[1] Act No. 2 of 1987 governs the establishment of special tribunals (accepted in Nigeria since colonial times); the Act was violated inasmuch as the "...constitution and jurisdiction of the tribunal was not raised before a court of law but before the special tribunal itself..." (p.21). In other words, the tribunal constituted itself! (Quotes in this section are taken from *Tell* magazine, where the report was published on 10.6.96, pp.21-24.)

[2] The nine points are as follows: a) denial of access to counsel, b) limiting the time the defence counsel had to prepare its brief, c) serious allegations concerning "...the credibility of witnesses, freedom of access to the tribunal and intimidation of the accused, their relatives and other members of the public" (p.22), d) harrassment of the defence counsel, e) only summaries - not copies - of statements by witnesses were given to the accused, f) important defence evidence was not permitted, g) the court refused to receive a statement prepared by Saro-Wiwa, h) affidavits of some prosecution witnesses saying that they had made their statements after having been bribed by the

showing how the defence was disadvantaged, were listed to justify this conclusion - a conclusion Saro-Wiwa and his lawyer, Chief Gani Fawehinmi, had arrived at before the end of the trial: with Saro-Wiwa's consent, Fawehinmi simply gave the case up. He has since been imprisoned.

According to the report, confirmation of the death sentences did not follow proper legal procedure: there was no time for the "confirming authority" (the Armed Forces Ruling Council) to receive the records of the trial before confirming conviction and sentence[3]. The condemned men would also have needed copies of the records to submit a petition for clemency.

0.1 Ken Saro-Wiwa - writer, agitator and administrator

As a writer, Ken Saro-Wiwa was a 'natural': he wrote novels, short stories and even a TV series in which serious themes were treated but where humour and irony were given free rein. Satire seems to be his natural style and makes itself felt in his letters to, and articles for, newspapers, in the scripts of his TV productions, his short stories or his novels. He wrote perceptively about Nigeria, its politics, culture and environment.

Ken Saro-Wiwa the agitator was also a 'natural'! However, the term 'agitator' in no way describes all his political talents. The existence and effectiveness of MOSOP as well as its having become internationally known is due to his organisational talent and his ability to use the media. There is another facet of his life which is crucial to a full understanding of his political activities - and crucial as an answer to those who are still happy to brand him as a murderer. This is the fact that he was involved in formal Nigerian government and in administrative bodies several times during his life. During these times, we see him cooperating at various levels of government and/or administration. He was not a hot-head bent on sowing discord.

His first spell in government began during the Nigerian civil war (1967-70); he escaped from 'Biafra' and joined the Rivers State Government in one of the first areas to fall to the federal troops; he was appointed a Commissioner (Minister) at the end of 1968 (see 1995: 49-

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authorities were not received in evidence, i) an appeal filed on 25 July, 1995 to the Court of Appeal to halt proceedings because the (military) tribunal was "...biased against the accused..." (p.22) was simply ignored. This appeal was "still pending" (p.22) when the death sentences were carried out on 10th November 1995.

[3] Part III of the Act (see note 1) says that "...the record of the proceedings of the tribunal shall be transmitted to the confirming authority for confirmation..." (p.22). And: "It was submitted before the mission that the records...were not ready and were, therefore, not sent to the confirming authority before it took the decision to confirm the conviction and sentence" (p.22). The report is at pains to point out that conviction and sentence are separate issues (the conviction could have been confirmed but the sentence lowered as being "excessive"). Since the records were not available, this distinction was procedurally impossible.

54). According to the Igbo/Biafran definition, he was a Biafran and therefore a traitor, thus his decision to join the Rivers State Government made him enemies among the Igbo. He was not alone here: many minority peoples in 'Biafra' sided with the federal troops against Biafra. Saro-Wiwa felt that this was the best chance for the Ogoni to have some control over the fruits of their petroleum reserves.

In 1973 he was sacked from the Rivers State Executive Council; he was disillusioned by the readiness of some Ogoni élites to "...take care of their own interests..." first. Later, 1976, he had a brief spell in local government. In 1977, he tried to enter the constituent assembly[4] and failed (see 1995: 55-56).

From 1977 he devoted himself to business and, from 1983, to writing. But he had one final experience of administration: in September 1987 he was appointed a full-time executive director of the Federal Government's Directorate of Mass Mobilization for Self-reliance, Social Justice and Economic Recovery (MAMSER), an organization with broad aims, directed at improving Nigerian life. When he first heard of the appointment to MAMSER he wondered whether "someone had decided to find out if I meant well or merely delighted in being negative" (1995: 59). By October 1988 he was convinced that putting the aims of MAMSER into practice would involve the Nigerian people raising awkward questions about the government, questions which would receive no answer; this was a contradiction which, he felt, limited his effectiveness. He resigned, considering the position to be untenable (1995:59-61).

During these periods we see Saro-Wiwa taking a constructive part in government and administration, trying to change the system from within. He was not a violent man: the only 'weapon' he ever reached for was his pen.

0.2 Saro-Wiwa's political writings

Ken Saro-Wiwa had years of experience writing for newspapers, both articles and letters; he had written long before he published his best-known works[5]. After his spells in the Rivers State and local governments, Saro-Wiwa turned his hand to business, full time. By the mid-eighties he had earned enough to be able to finance a return to his "first love" (1995: 57): writing. He had left government and administration but was still informally involved in politics. In *A Month and a Day* he wrote:

[4] This was set up by General Obasanjo to debate and eventually shape the new civilian constitution under which the Shagari government (1979-83) operated.

[5] When he turned his hand to serious writing in the eighties he had a treasure of old manuscripts to re-work: *On a Darkling Plain* was written soon after the war ended in 1970 but published in 1989, while he was busy founding MOSOP.

> "...literature in a critical situation such as Nigeria's cannot be divorced from politics. Indeed, literature must serve society by steeping itself in politics...writers must not merely write to amuse... They must play an interventionist role. My experience has been that African governments can ignore writers, taking comfort in the fact that only few can read and write... Therefore the writer must be *l'homme engagé* „the intellectual man of action." (1995:81)

When it became clear that his writing could earn him money, writing became a kind of twin-track strategy: he could both highlight the Ogoni question and make money to pursue his aims. In one of his last letters smuggled out of prison, he wrote:

> "The most important thing for me is that I've used my talents as a writer to enable the Ogoni people to confront their tormentors. I was not able to do it as a politician or a businessman. My writing did it." (1995:xv).

The "tormentors" of Ogoni[6] were successive Nigerian governments and the oil companies operating in Nigeria[7]. One of his most urgent and repeated appeals in his political writings is for a fair distribution of the profits made from oil; by 'fair distribution' he meant that those on whose land it was found and who suffered directly as a result of its production should get a proportionally larger share[8]. Here he was not just fighting for the Ogoni, he wanted equal rights for all the 'ethnic nations' of Nigeria - small, medium and large. He called this struggle "internal colonialism" (1995:18), a term he took from the Yoruba leader, Obafemi Awolowo, someone he identified with as an ally in the same wider struggle (see 1991:36-43, 47-52 and 1995:63). Later he became aware of peoples on other continents who had suffered the fate befalling the Ogoni and was able to enlist the support of the Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization (UNPO) as well as various international bodies such as Greenpeace and Survival International. His experience in the media helped him here; he was also able to finance himself through his writings.

To see oil revenues distributed unfairly and used by the élite for their own selfish ends was something he found intolerable; especially because the élite was composed largely of majority 'ethnic nations' (the Hausa in the North, the Yoruba in the South-West and the Igbo in the South-East) who paid no price whatsoever for the oil which financed their life-style. Thus his

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[6] The Ogoni languages make no distinction between people and land: "...the land and the people are one and are expressed as such in our local languages. It emphasizes, to my mind, the close relationship between the Ogoni people and their environment." (1995:2)

[7] The main oil companies, in order of importance, are: Shell, Mobil, Chevron, Agip, Elf and Texaco; they operate in joint ventures with the government-owned Nigerian National Petroleum Company.

[8] He considered the 1.5% "derivation money to oil-bearing communities in Rivers State and elsewhere...insulting". The 1.5% was a reduction by Buhari of "the mean and niggardly two per cent accepted by Shagari" (1991: 64). In the past, the oil-producing areas had received much more: "Before the military seized power, the governments in the areas were entitled to at least 50 per cent of such proceeds, in addition to rent and royalties" (1995: 55).

struggle went beyond the government and oil companies operating in Nigeria, it encompassed the Nigerian élite as a whole, and was a struggle against widespread corruption, greed and dishonesty - themes we find writ large in his fiction.

If Saro-Wiwa used his pen as a weapon to express opposition, he was not a blinkered critic, he gave credit where it was due. A good example of this is his defence of Buhari's government in a letter to a newspaper (3. May 1984); here he expressed his disagreement with Archbishop Okogie, the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Lagos:

> How is a government which is but four months old and which inherited an empty treasury and unpaid salary arrears of about one year expected to perform miracles? If such miracles can be performed, why is Archbishop Okogie, himself a man of God, not performing them? (1991:84-5)

Irony and humour are self-evident here but this letter shows Saro-Wiwa defending the Nigerian government in its struggle to make the best of a difficult situation. Another, later, example of Saro-Wiwa supporting (Babangida's) government was a speech given at Jos in 1988, while he was still a director of MAMSER:

> ...there is no shortage of understanding of the government's predicament as it struggles to solve problems which were not of its own creation...and to satisfy the nation's creditors. However, the government must carry the people along with it, in the long-term interest of the nation. (1991: 120-131)

Both the above are good examples of how Saro-Wiwa tried to engage in creative dialogue - in or out of administrative positions.

1.0 Fiction: Themes and Language

For Saro-Wiwa, engaging in politics, writing about politics and writing fiction were different ways of trying to achieve the same aims. His politics inform his fiction, his fiction is another form of political activity. With his political activities and writings as a background, I shall try to assess his novels, *Sozaboy* (1985) and *Prisoners of Jebs* (1988) as well as some of the short stories in *A Forest of Flowers* (1986). Central to his work is *Basi and Company* (1987): its characters seem to epitomise Saro-Wiwa's understanding of Nigeria's problems. In the conclusion Saro-Wiwa is compared with other authors.

1.1 Political Themes: *Sozaboy* and *Prisoners of Jebs*

Ken Saro-Wiwa's first novel, *Sozaboy*, was published in 1985; it is a fictional account of the Nigerian civil war. One of *Sozaboy*'s most striking features is the language. It is written in 'rotten English' - the words '*A novel in rotten English*' being the subtitle. An example of

'rotten English' is the title itself: 'Sozaboy' is one way of pronouncing the more frequently heard 'sojaboy', which is of course 'soldier boy'. Here is an example of the 'rotten English', but also of the joy, the expectation and the sadness.

> Although, everybody in Dukana was happy at first.
> All the nine villages were dancing and we were eating plenty maize with pear and knacking tory under the moon. Because the work on the farm have finished and the yams were growing well well. And because the old, bad government have dead, and the new government of soza and police have come.
> Everybody was saying that everything will be good in Dukana because of new government. They were saying that *kotuma ashbottom* from Bori cannot take bribe from people in Dukana again. They were saying too that all those policemen who used to chop big bribe from people who get case will not chop again. Everybody was happy because from that time, even magistrate in the court at Bori will begin to give better judgement. And traffic police will do his work well well. Even one woman was talking that the sun will shine proper proper and people will not die again because there will be medicine in the hospital and the doctor will not charge money for operation. Yes, everybody in Dukana was happy. And they were all singing. (p.1)

The words "at first" qualify the happiness with which the story begins at the end of the very first sentence. The narrative takes its course with the narrator, Sozaboy a young, naive recruit, joining the 'Biafran' army full of big ideas, fighting his way through the war, gradually realising how senseless it is. He escapes death miraculously on occasion, is hospitalised, imprisoned and, eventually, becomes a driver for the other side! One day he simply leaves and drives home to Dukana, his own village. He finds it ravaged by the war, hears that his mother and young wife have either died or left the village - his wife with another soldier. He leaves his jeep in Dukana to seek them, goes from camp to camp, witnessing the horrors of war for the civilian population. He pays a final visit to Dukana to discover that his mother and his wife died there in a bombing raid and that he himself has been given up for dead; worse still, he was, apparently, not properly buried and is thought to be a spirit who carries a new juju disease. The story ends as follows:

> So now I just get up from where I was sitting....I just get up and begin to go. As I was going, I looked at the place where my mama house used to stand. And tears began to drop like rain from my eyes. I walked quickly from my own town Dukana and in fact I did not know where I was going.
> And as I was going, I was just thinking how the war have spoiled my town Dukana, uselessed many people, killed many others, killed my mama and my wife Agnes, my beautiful young wife...and now it have made me like porson wey get leprosy because I have no town again.
> And I was thinking how I was prouding before to go to soza and call myself Sozaboy. But now if anybody say anything about war or even fight, I will

> just run and run and run and run and run. Believe me yours sincerely. (p.181)

In these brief passages we see a number of instances of 'rotten English' all of which can be quickly learned by the diligent reader: the word "although" at the beginning is, for standard English, misplaced, used perhaps to impress rather than with its usual meaning of 'even if' or 'notwithstanding'; "porson wey" means 'person who'; "knacking tory" means "telling stories"; the word "talking" is used instead of 'saying'[9]; the verb "have" is not conjugated; "chop" means 'eat' or 'profit from something'; "get case" means 'be involved in a court case'; the adjectives 'proud' and 'useless' appear as verbs; adverbs like "well" and "proper" are doubled to strengthen their effect - a technique typical of West African languages.

Rotten English "has the advantage of having no rules and...is part of the dislocated and discordant society in which Sozaboy must live, move and have not his being" (1985: Author's note)[10]. That little word "not" is a good example of Saro-Wiwa's irony, thrown in to upset the known rhythm and the reassurance of the religious phrase 'live, move and have his being.'

"Whether it [rotten English] throbs vibrantly enough and communicates effectively is my experiment" (1985: Author's note). His gamble with style works very well: it is not real pidgin; this would be "incomprehensible to the European reader" (Saro-Wiwa quoting one of his university teachers; 1985: Author's note), but it is close enough to pidgin and everyday Nigerian English to give a flavour of these languages. It mirrors the people who speak it and, perhaps most importantly, the people he hoped would read it. It remains close to its subject in form, content and appeal. Its not being standard English in no way diminishes its ability to carry the story and its emotions; if anything both are enhanced. The 'rotten English' makes Sozaboy painfully present to the reader: he risks his life, discovers that his mother and wife are dead and that he has no further place in his home. The final words, "...yours sincerely" (p. 181) make his naivete pitifully clear; at the same time, they bring him very close - as if the whole story was written as a letter to a very close friend or relative.

1.2 Prisoners of Jebs

The novel *Prisoners of Jebs* (1988) is probably the most overtly political fiction Ken Saro-Wiwa wrote. It was first published in serial form in *Vanguard* newspaper. Its clear political intent and content - especially the barely veiled critique of Nigeria and some Nigerians -

[9] This use of 'talking' is, in fact, Shakespearean: "Sir, we were talking that our garments seem now as fresh as when we were at Tunis..." (The Tempest, Act II, Scene I; Shakespeare, n.d., p. 16). At least one other element is indo-germanic: 'knacken' means 'to crack' in German; thus "knacking tory" is similar to English: 'cracking a joke'.

[10] Ken Saro-Wiwa was not a linguist! Every language, including 'Rotten English', has grammatical rules. His statement here should be viewed as poetic licence and not taken at face-value.

earned Saro-Wiwa warnings from well-meaning friends, but he continued to write and the editor of *Vanguard* continued to publish.

Jebs is a fictional prison for African criminals built by the OAU off Bar Beach in Lagos. Each episode is devoted to a person or event so that various people, real or fictional, land in Jebs; each main character is someone Saro-Wiwa thought should be in prison, most of them Nigerians. Some are named according to their crime; thus we find Madame and Miss Kokane (cocaine) - whose arrival at the prison excites more than just the interest of the male prisoners and the Director! The Director is a weak character who had already succumbed to the temptation to embezzle prison funds:

> The Director had fallen in love with the rich treasury that was the Prison's and was determined, as his first act in the Prison, to empty it. (p.12)

The Director often seeks and takes the advice of Chief Popa (a Nigerian, and a Jebs inmate because he embezzled the funds for its construction!):

> For his effort, Chief Popa was rewarded with the Director's ear. In this ear were bags of rice, cartons of corned beef, cartons of milk, puncheons of alcohol, crates of tobacco and sundry other good things of life. (p.10)

Prisoners of Jebs is highly amusing; its obvious political content need not be described at length here. The following brief extracts show that the guise of fiction can do nothing to hide the author's intention:

> The Director had conducted his administration in the fitful way he knew. He had, as was usual in Nigeria, served himself first, and being sated, he was busy doing his best, such as it was, for the Prison. (p.89)

> As in every typical Nigerian drama, fact got lost in fiction, plots were confused and unclear, truth got drowned in verbiage. (p.63)

> What surprised [the Director] most was the extent to which Jebs had begun to look like Nigeria... All nations were supposed to send their best political prisoners [to Jebs]. Most did so. But not the Nigerians, who in their usual lawlessness asserted that they did not practice politics in their country, but "bellytics". And since everyone had to eat, all Nigerians were "bellyticians". Ergo, everyone was a politician and qualified for a home in Jebs Prison... So did it happen that the Nigerians filled Jebs with a bunch of petty criminals... Apart from Professor and Chief Popa, who had some pretensions to dignity, there was no-one of significance from Nigeria. And because one of every four Africans is a Nigerian, the latter completely infected the Prison. Before their loudness and foolishness, the rest of the prisoners were forced to silence. (p.64)

Some episodes or characters have a personal rather than a political backgound: one such character is a journalist, Pita Dumbrok, whose presence in Jebs is Saro-Wiwa's literary revenge on the journalist, Pita Okute, who annoyed Saro-Wiwa in a review of *Sozaboy* by suggesting it had a "silly plot" (1988: 178, note 10). In *Jebs*, Dumbrok represents those Nigerian journalists who, in the opinion of Saro-Wiwa, are not worthy of their profession; he spends the first half of the book in a cage in the prison courtyard chirping "silly plot"; later he is released from the cage after having proved capable of using his intelligence! (Having had his revenge, Saro-Wiwa allows Dumbrok to escape the final fate of Jebs and its inmates sinking into the sea.)

One character in the book, the Professor, seems to be inspired by Wole Soyinka. In the final chapters there are several quotes from Soyinka's play, *The Road* (there is a professor in this play). The two authors did not always see eye to eye: one instance of this was Saro-Wiwa's sharp reaction to Soyinka's suggestion in 1977 that Swahili be used as a pan-African language[11].

Most of *Jebs* however is political. Some episodes are very detailed, some are complemented by footnotes for those who may not be aware of a reference or of the event which occasioned the episode. Generally, anyone with some knowledge of recent Nigerian politics can enjoy the satire. Certain quarters seem not to have enjoyed it however: *Jebs* did nothing to improve Saro-Wiwa's relationship with those who eventually murdered him. Nor did he expect it to: "...should [*Jebs*] continue to scare a few people, that would not be bad at all. After all, fear is an important theme of the story" (1988: Author's note).

1.3 Culture and Environment: *A Forest of Flowers*

Written in 1986, this is a book of short stories mainly about Ogoni; many take place in the village of Dukana, *Sozaboy*'s village. I shall quote from a few of the stories only. In *A share of Profit* (pp.40-46) we see how Bom is cheated by Kara, another villager. Bom is an unmarried man who lives with his mother, who drinks too much alcolhol and takes too much snuff - in European terms, the village idiot. The setting is the civil war, with the Nigerian army 'occupying' Dukana. Bom enters into a deal with the despised army (further lowering his standing in the community) getting Kara to invest £ 300. After a successful conclusion, Bom brings £ 500 to Kara, not realising that £ 100 is for himself, £ 100 is for Kara and £ 300 is

[11] Soyinka made this suggestion at the Festac, a pan-African cultural festival held in Lagos, March 1977. Saro-Wiwa responded with a short satirical story called *Bondudekiswahili* (see The Brink of Disaster, 1991:67-70). He rejected Swahili as a pan-African language out of loyalty to minority groups whose languages would lose out whichever majority language(s) were adopted - for Nigeria, for West Africa or for Africa as a whole. (The OAU has since taken steps to introduce Arabic, Swahili and Hausa - the most widely spoken language in West Africa - as official OAU languages.)

Kara's original investment. Kara soon realises that Bom hasn't counted his own share. He puts the £ 500 into his left shoe and gives Bom £ 2:

> 'Thank you, kindly,' smiled Bom. 'You have made me more than rich.'
> And he tossed the notes into the air and played with them as they danced to the ground.
> And Kara walked away, his heavy left foot following after him slowly. (p.46)

Another story, *Case No. 100* (pp.73-85), concerns two policemen on night duty. Saro-Wiwa takes us through their night duty in the police-station, through the whole range of inefficiency and dirt, and of small-time corruption - themes he had the opportunity to experience at first hand and write about in *A Month and a Day* (1995: chapter 3). Both in his fiction and his real 'detention diary', he portrays policemen as ordinary human beings.

There is a touching story about the beautiful Lebia, *The Divorcee* (pp.53-62), who, being unable to bear children, returns home to "...the hard discomfort of the mound of mud [her single bed] in the outer room and the monotony of life with her mother" (p.49). As for the mother, she had hoped to get more land through marrying her daughter to a rich man. When, after three years, it became clear that she was "'not productive'" (p.51; Saro-Wiwa uses quotation marks for this term) her husband returned her: "'I am returning your daughter. I want my money back.'" (p.51). The mother sold her land, "...pawned her clothes and put together the two hundred naira, a goat and chicken which she had received from her son-in-law. She paid him off" (pp.51-2). Saro-Wiwa was not a romantic.

The story of *Garga* (pp.117-125), set in Kano (the largest city in Hausa-dominated northern Nigeria, where I lived for four years), is a bit disappointing. The description feels unreal - not like those of Dukana which I feel I recognise from films on, and various books about, southern Nigeria as well as from Ken Saro-Wiwa's living descriptions.

2.0 *Basi and Company*

From 1985-1990, Saro-Wiwa directed his talents to writing and producing the popular TV comedy series, *Basi and Company*. In 1987 he published *Basi and Company: A modern African Folktale* (1987), a novel in the form of episodes - the original form on TV. These episodes have a moral. Saro-Wiwa compares them to the traditional tales told to children in Africa, tales told so that the children will "go to bed well-entertained and educated at the end of the session" (1987: Author's note). I think *Basi and Company* is the best novel for an analysis of how Saro-Wiwa portrays his characters, especially of how he highlights certain characteristics which one might label 'Nigerianness'.

2.1 The main characters in Basi

The main character in the Street (Adetola Street where Basi is set) is Basi, "a man in search of big, quick money" (1987:20). Living in one room, Basi is so convinced - and convincing - that he will one day get rich that he and all the characters call his room 'The Palace'. Basi wears a red singlet with the caption: "To be a Millionaire" (on the front), "Think like a Millionaire" (on the back)! Next to Basi in importance is Madam, his landlady, a beautiful spinster-businesswoman who owns 'The Palace'. She is an "Amerodolian" (a member of the "American Dollar Club") and her relationship to Basi (or, more accurately, the rumour surrounding it) is central to the action.

Alali lives in Basi's room, at Basi's expense; he sometimes looks for but never finds real work. Dandy is the barkeeper of 'Dandy's Bar'; he wears a bowler hat, pink shirt and well-pressed trousers, in order to impress. Dandy's best friend, Josco (known by Dandy as "Zosco" - Dandy's "jays became zees", see p.19), sells contraband goods and frequents but does not live on the Street. There is Segi a beautiful young woman who "wanted to go to University, but was not in a hurry to get there" (p.23); she dressed expensively but "had no visible means of livelihood" (p.24).

There is of course a market. And there is a taxi named 'Psalm 31'[12]. There is also Dr Ndu's herbal centre, where the "colossus", gonorrhea, could be cured in four to twelve days: "it was all quite mathematical if not scientific" (p.16). Finally, there is "Quickpenny's Spares Parts Store" for cars where expensive parts were "sold as new" but were either "second-new" (second-hand or "cannibalized" from broken-down cars) or made in Hong Kong or Taiwan. Next-door to Quickpenny's was Madam Badejo's shack where many came to "fill their stomachs" on her fried plantain (p.18).

In *Basi* the language remains close to Nigerian reality and to its readership. Saro-Wiwa introduces elements of 'rotten English' but nowhere near as much - or as effectively - as in *Sozaboy*[13].

2.2 Tragicomedy and Reality in *Basi and Company*

Tragicomedy (and its roots in everyday life) is found in every episode. In *The Contract* (pp.89 - 104), Madam has been assured by the Principal Secretary in the Ministry that she has excellent chances of winning "a 'megacontract'" worth "ten million Naira and covering a wide variety of goods, including spare parts for aircraft, tractors, furniture, drilling rigs, pins,

[12] Saro-Wiwa obviously knew his psalms; his explanation - pp.14-15 - of the significance of the name *Psalm 31* is extremely funny.

[13] In the novel he comments on the use of language (1987: 30) and, I feel, puts too much into its symbolism in Basi - TV or book. (I have seen two episodes of Basi on video. I was not over-impressed with the acting and enjoyed the book more.)

clips and toilet rolls." (p.89). Basi has seen the advert in the newspaper and is determined to get the contract. Madam who has never filled in forms, paid taxes or learned to count, enlists the help of Alali to help her fill in the forms, Josco to get her the necessary 'Tax Certificate' and Dandy to get the 'Certificate of Proficiency in Mathematical Calculations'. Each knows she will probably cheat him but helps her anyway, hoping to profit in some miraculous way.

For the interview, Madam dressed and drove appropriately: "It was a cardinal policy of the business class of Lagos that the contracts you won were directly proportional to the way you dressed and the car you drove" (p.100). She had also had a secret meeting with the Principal Secretary of the Ministry "...in a place known only to both of them" (p.90). Thus, despite the fact that she submitted her false forms and certificates *after* the deadline (Basi did it on time!) she wins the contract. Suddenly all her helpers panic, realising that as yet they do not have even the promise of a reward. They meet in Dandy's Bar each regretting his part in helping Madam. Basi and Segi are also there and it is Segi who, on hearing their story (and for her own reasons), goes off to the Board or Ministry with Alali to expose Madam and deny her the fruits of success. The men in Dandy's are suddenly worried:

> 'Suppose they ask who forged Madam's certificates?' asked Josco.
> 'They won't ask,' opined Dandy.
> 'Why not?' inquired Josco.
> 'Because they are thick as bricks at the Board. Corrupt to the teeth. Anyway, we can always lay it at Madam's door. She ought to know how to wriggle out. Spideress!' said Basi.
> 'Hell, I should have known that!' Dandy cheered. 'Madam's in the soup!' (p.102)

All return to Basi's to await Madam's return. Madam returns, "the letter of award in her handbag" (p.102). As she passes Basi's place she announces victory. Suddenly scenting money (after all they had helped her!) they congratulate her and she goes to bring their reward.

> Alali [who had gone to the Ministry with Segi] waited for some time for *Psalm 31* to turn up. It did not. So he ran the distance back to the "Palace", arriving as Dandy was praising Madam as a great lady and Basi was bemoaning the fact that she could now afford to be generous. Alali had run a great race, and was out of breath.
> 'I've submitted the letter,' he said. 'Madam's finished.'
> 'Finished?' asked Basi. 'Go back, Al, and withdraw the letter immediately.'
>
> 'Why?... What's the...' stammered Alali.
> 'Don't argue,' commanded Dandy. 'Go and withdraw the letter.'
> 'Can't be done,' Alali said. 'As soon as I submitted Segi's letter, the Secretary read it, and quickly wrote a letter cancelling the contract award.'
>
> 'Wharahell!' shouted Dandy, holding his head in agony.
> 'The contract is cancelled?' asked Josco in anguish.

> 'Yes. Here's the letter of cancellation. It's addressed to Madam,' said Alali, showing everyone the letter.
> As Madam's footsteps were heard outside, Basi said to Alali: 'Pocket that letter in the name of God. Madam must not see it!'
> Madam breezed into the room and distributed little brown envelopes to everyone.
> 'Here is the money I promised you all,' she said.
> Eagerly they tore open the envelopes. And seeing that each envelope contained but five naira, they exchanged bitter glances.
> 'Holy Moses!' exclaimed Basi. 'Al, hand her the letter.'
> 'What letter?' asked Madam.
> 'It's from the Tenders Board,' said Alali, handing it to her.
> Madam read the letter and collapsed on the spot. Basi and his friends pelted her with her brown envelopes.
> And one more great hope on Adetola Street fell on its proud face. (1987: pp.103-4)

The tragicomedy in this episode is the readiness of the main characters to switch allegiance, depending on who might best be expected to make their respective fantasies come true. Those who originally helped Madam are suddenly frightened that the forgeries will be found out; on being told that she will get the blame, they rejoice at her defeat. Then, briefly, they join with Basi to celebrate her apparent victory, but pelt her with her brown envelopes when her defeat is finally clear. Basi, who competed with Madam, is quite ready to accept her victory when he realises that he himself has only this one, thin, chance to profit from the situation in any way at all; thus Alali has to return to the Ministry to try and help Madam! However, like the others, Basi is happy to pelt her with her brown envelopes: she didn't win and she didn't give them enough! In fact, the only consistent character in the whole episode is Madam: she simply does what any of the others would have done if they had had the chance - she lies, cheats and, apparently, 'sells herself' to the Principal Secretary in order to make easy money.

2.3 The symbolism and psychology of Saro-Wiwa's characters

'Adetola Street', the setting for *Basi*, is of course Nigeria. Basi and his neighbours are quintessential Nigerians, struggling for status and wealth in competitively hostile and tragically opaque surroundings. Worst of all, Basi and his neighbours *are* the hostile surroundings; together, they contribute to the lack of transparency in their mutual affairs: "The ability to support both sides of any argument and profit from both...was a necessary part of...life on Adetola Street" (p.16). In *Basi* the characters are ready to lie and cheat, to use and deceive one another in order to achieve their aim. But they also help one another - if they think they can get something out of it! When Segi and Dandy form "a certain chumminess...aimed at the destruction of Basi and Madam", it is "...as unreal a friendship as might be expected only on Adetola Street". (*The Vendor of Titles, p.80*). They never realise

that if they worked together toward the aim they all have in common - making money - it might be to their mutual benefit!

Ken Saro-Wiwa did not write ideologically or create two-dimensional characters, he is interested in people and the presentation is realistic. The characters he invents are human, with both 'good' and 'bad' sides to them. While their day-to-day reality takes on a life of its own, and though short-cuts may be taken (or details exaggerated) for narrative reasons (or, quite simply, to get a good laugh), Saro-Wiwa never distorts his characters or the reality in which he sets them. Nor does he condemn his characters; with humour, irony and occasional sadness, he portrays them as poor or rich, honest or corrupt, happy or sad, in charge of their own lives - to a greater or lesser extent. However all his characters are believable and human; specifically, they are Nigerian.

2.4 The `show-off' attitude: Owambe

In *Jebs*, Saro-Wiwa tells us that one new inmate "had heard that the Nigerian prisoners were loud and noisy, dirty and dangerous, and a bunch of unhappy show-offs" (1988:60). Basi is a persuasive show-off, boasting about his fantasy plans before they are concrete, discussing how he will manage his success, putting down those less successful than himself - and minimizing the fact that the success he so carefully planned never materializes!

The 'show-off' attitude seems to be an accepted part of contemporary Nigerian urban life[14]. There is a Yoruba term - Owambe - for this: 'Owambe' (derived from the phrase 'owa ni ba' which means 'There it is!' or perhaps 'This is it!') was an accepted form of conspicuous consumption in traditional Yoruba society. In modern, oil-rich, Nigeria, 'Owambe' has lost its traditional and purely Yoruba character and its now perverted meaning makes one think of easy money, big cars or flamboyant - but inappropriate - architecture. The attitude of showing off to prove that one has made it - or that one is 'on the make' - is felt by its critics to have spread like a gangrene through Nigerian public life and even into the private sphere. A typical story (the details may be apocryphal) is the one about the local government annual meeting: There is a budget of 18 million Naira; the chief councillor, having declared the meeting open, counts those present, arrives at a figure of eighteen and suggests that they divide the sum by this figure. All agree and go home content, their work for the coming year completed.

The Owambe attitude brings us back to Saro-Wiwa's theme of the distribution of oil-revenue: peoples such as the Ogoni pay daily for the 'easy money' enjoyed mainly by the élites of other, majority, groups. Their showing-off must be very hard to swallow.

[14] I am grateful to Mr Heinrich Bergstresser and his wife, Sibylle Pohly-Bergstresser, as well as to Mr Willy Thomas for their information and help in this section. The Owambe attitude is described in an international co-production (October-November, 1995) between the Deutsche Welle (Voice of Germany), Köln and the Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria, Lagos, broadcast by the Deutsche Welle on 5. January 1996.

Nevertheless *Basi* was a humorous way of making this theme critically available, a healthy possibility of laughing at one's own foibles. It is typical of Saro-Wiwa's approach to his writing and politics that *Basi and Company* are lovable characters. Despite his many criticisms of Nigeria, Saro-Wiwa loved his country.

3.0 A summary of Saro-Wiwa's writing qualities

A final word about Saro-Wiwa's characters is in order: while they are anything but two-dimensional, there is nevertheless an absence of depth - something one might expect from a great author. Perhaps Saro-Wiwa will not be remembered as a great author: it is true that he does not portray *inner* struggle, he does not psychoanalyse his characters or take the reader into their souls. Even *Sozaboy* who gets a whole novel to himself is simply allowed to be himself (very convincingly!). Saro-Wiwa's characters do not have to *come to terms* with themselves, they do not philosophise or psychologise. Relationships between the characters are similarly uncomplicated. Furthermore his characters are never overtly political: even the characters in *Jebs* are kept out of actual political activity and away from serious political analysis - as is *Sozaboy*.

However, Saro-Wiwa's characters are holistic; they represent (in all senses of the word) the context from which they come and in which Saro-Wiwa leaves them. As Florence Akst expresses it: his stories have "the cumulative power of accurate *réportage*" (Arts in Africa, BBC African Service, on the fly-leaf of *A Forest of Flowers*). Saro-Wiwa's talent lies in showing, with a few tricks of the literary light, how ordinary Nigerians behave and think - and how they think about the behaviour of their fellow Nigerians. The settings his characters inhabit allow no time for introspection. He simply holds up a mirror or picture to the reader and lets him or her draw their own conclusions.

It is no accident that Saro-Wiwa's novels are in the form of episodes: *Jebs* and *Basi* were written and published as episodes, *Sozaboy* is not published in the same form but its chapters take us from one event to the next, like episodes. The episode form suits both Saro-Wiwa's aims and his talents - his aims were both political and literary, his talents were his social and political awareness, his satirical style and his ability to bring us close to characters and events.

3.1 Comparisons with other authors

The most obvious comparison is Wole Soyinka. Both he and Saro-Wiwa are writers, both have dabbled in formal Nigerian politics (neither of them liked it!), both have worked for a better Nigeria. During the civil war, both were defined by one side or the other as traitors: Soyinka, born and living in 'federal' territory, was imprisoned for his anti-federalist opinions and activities; Saro-Wiwa, born and living in 'Biafra', worked for the federal government!

Nigeria and its development is a common theme in their literature, - although Soyinka does not make it central to his *oeuvre*.

Soyinka's novels will probably endure longer than Saro-Wiwa's: there is more depth and breadth. His characters are certainly more developed; indeed, *The Interpreters* (1965), with its leaps backwards and forwards in time, depends on their development for its unity. Soyinka seems able to enrich his settings effortlessly with Yoruba culture; Saro-Wiwa, while perfectly capable of describing Ogoni culture (in *Sozaboy* and *A Forest of Flowers*), does not weave it into his work like Soyinka. Again, Saro-Wiwa's command of English - be it for letters or novels, for satire, humour or tragedy - is admirable, but Soyinka's use of English is exceptionally creative[15]. Nevertheless, the invention of 'rotten English' in *Sozaboy* is, in terms of creativity, a first-class experiment.

As a satirist and political journalist, Ken Saro-Wiwa bears comparison with Swift or Defoe[16]. *Basi and Company* and *Prisoners of Jebs* will probably not survive as long as *Gulliver's Travels* or *Robinson Crusoe*, perhaps simply because Saro-Wiwa the author is not on the same level. Perhaps too because he did not try to make his stories ageless; he wrote about his own time and mainly about one part of his own country.

There are striking similarities between Saro-Wiwa and the English authoress, Sue Townsend. Both come very close to their characters and both have a sense of humour arising from an intimate knowledge of their subject - a humour which depends on attention to the details which characterise a situation or which, quite simply, make a good joke good. They are both at home in the rough and tumble of ordinary social-life (Saro-Wiwa also in the horrors of war) not in its academic or ideological representations. Townsend chooses themes which are off the beaten track (her *Adrian Mole* novels) and treats her characters in her very own way: her Queen in *The Queen and I* (1992) is portrayed as a real and very human survivor. Nevertheless, the book thumbs its nose at the British establishment - and not just at the royal family. Saro-Wiwa thumbs his nose at Nigeria (only implicitly at the Nigerian establishment), but, like Townsend, he leaves his characters human. They are both engaged political and social commentators; both are fair to their targets.

One final comparison is in order: in *A Month and a Day* Saro-Wiwa shows himself to be a fairly accomplished diarist; one thinks of Samuel Pepys. Saro-Wiwa does not give a day-to-day account of his life but he brings us very close to his 'month and a day' under arrest in 1993. The fact that he later corrected and re-drafted the manuscript while in prison (1994-95 -

[15] While I find Soyinka's ability to play creatively with the English language brilliant, I sometimes find his style heavy - not as easy to read as Saro-Wiwa.

[16] The comparison with Swift (as well as Gogol and Heine) is made on the fly-leaf of *Prisoners of Jebs* by Professor Willfried Feuser. The parallels between Defoe and Saro-Wiwa go beyond literature: both were businessmen and both interested in politics; Defoe however was not successful in business, nor was he true to himself in politics.

the text was smuggled in) puts him in stark contrast to someone who could peacefully end his daily entry with the sentence: 'And so to bed.'

4.0 Conclusion

Ken Saro-Wiwa was not content to simply write, he was also an agitator. Given the circumstances of his life and death, it is difficult not to present him as a martyr. People who knew him liked him, but say he was no saint. He was a small, lively, person who, apparently, could be very strong-willed. He was unwilling to publish any author other than himself in his publishing company, Saros International. A close reading of the early chapters of *A Month and a Day* shows him to be very human and perfectly willing to exploit the loopholes of Nigerian society in his own interests: there are several examples of his using his influence with policemen (some of whom he knew or got to know) to bend the rules and provide himself or his companions with a small privilege or some extra comfort. One wonders too whether the irony which permeates his writings made him aware of the fact that he was very much a member of the élite he criticised - and whether he rather enjoyed this irony! It is not difficult to imagine him sitting in a VIP airport lounge enjoying the discomfort of a fellow passenger who has just appeared as a *Prisoner of Jebs*!

Perhaps his identifying the Nigerian élite as the enemy was the reason he died. His education, his business activities, his occasional participation in administration as well as his writing enabled him to live like the élite. He travelled to and from London, Geneva or the USA with them; he educated his children in the same élite schools as they did. And yet, despite similarity in life-style and the opportunity to make corrupt money in government (apparently he was offered, and turned down, a post in Abacha's administration), he lived uncorrupted. He did not need corrupt money; he earned his own money - honestly. In a society in which, it is often said, anyone can be bought, Ken Saro-Wiwa was an exception, an exception who must have been a thorn in the flesh to many of those he travelled with or associated with in business or administration. He was an independent spirit - he made his own decisions about joining or leaving government, engaging in business, politics or writing; this incorruptible independence of spirit must have galled the enemies he knew he was making and whom he was prepared to oppose to the bitter end.

As if fighting the international oil industry, the Nigerian government and the Nigerian élite was not enough, he also pitted himself and MOSOP (whose members tended to be younger) against the traditional Ogoni élite; this involved a difference of generation. Apparently, Abacha consulted Ogoni chiefs in Port Harcourt before making the final decision to have him executed.

Ken Saro-Wiwa was a journalist, a TV producer, a novelist, satirist and a diarist. There may be better authors in Africa, but he enjoyed writing and, all comparisons apart, he was good.

He gave up the chance of what might have been a brilliant academic career by joining the Rivers State Government in 1968 (see 1995:29). Perhaps he could have brushed up on his style or given his characters and their relationships more psychological depth. However, the Ken Saro-Wiwa we know did not live in an ivory tower; he wrote from his experience, from his life. His characters have a reality which an academic life-style might have denied them. Perhaps the structural-functionalist term 'participant-observation' best describes his approach to writing. His closeness to Nigerian life is in every story, it seeps out of the pores of his books, the books he lived, wrote and published himself.

Understanding his writings - and specifically his satirical humour - takes on an even greater significance if we are to have a balanced picture of a man who put himself on a confrontation course with the authorities at every level of society. The irony and satirical humour which typify his writings were, and were meant to be, an attempt to create dialogue - a dialogue about justice and change - with friend and foe alike. This is equally true of his roles as agitator or administrator. As for incitement to murder, it is nowhere to be found in his 'Table of Contents'.

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Dr. Oyekan Owomoyela is a Professor of English at the University of Nebraska, Lincoln. He specializes in African Literatures, Film, and Folklore. His publications include *African Literatures: An Introduction*; *Vision and Revisions: Essays on African Literatures and Criticism*; *A Kì í: Yorùbá Proscriptive and Prescriptive Proverbs*; *The African Difference: Discourses on Africanity and the Relativity of Cultures*; and the edited volume, *A History of Twentieth-Century African Literatures*.

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